

PS2 | GameCube | Xbox | PC | GBA | Arcade | Retro

REVIEWED

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!! [GC]
GTA: DOUBLE PACK [XB]
PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2 [XB]
GHOSTHUNTER [PS2]
RAINBOW SIX 3 [XB]
MAX PAYNE 2 [PC]
METAL ARMS [PS2/XB/GC]
CALL OF DUTY [PC]
AMPED 2 [XB]
TRUE CRIME [PS2/XB/GC]

180 PAGES OF VISIONARY GAMING

PREVIEWED

SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

Ubisoft continues to think outside the box

FEATURE

HARD SELL

Which console do high-street retailers *really* prefer?

RETRO

PC ENGINE

We test-drive NEC's classic console


eMag

Among the slew of recently released triple-A titles such as *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* and *Project Gotham Racing 2* (both of which are reviewed in this issue), it's interesting to note that the games of one publisher in particular are proving notably worthy. Having impressed at E3, Ubisoft's releases this year have been solid, at times inspired, and yet they have impressed without drawing much attention to the publisher – clearly, its intention is to let its games do the talking.

The traditional Christmas push has seen Ubisoft release *Rainbow Six 3*, *Prince Of Persia* and *Beyond Good & Evil* within weeks of each other – and all three are well worth a look. Ubisoft's 2004 schedule is looking equally impressive, with Sam Fisher making a very welcome return (you can find the results of *Pandora Tomorrow*'s first ever playtest on pages 42-45). And the award-winning *Far Cry* and *Matrix Online* already look set to further consolidate Ubisoft as one of the most exciting and varied publishers around.

Simon Phillips, Group Editor






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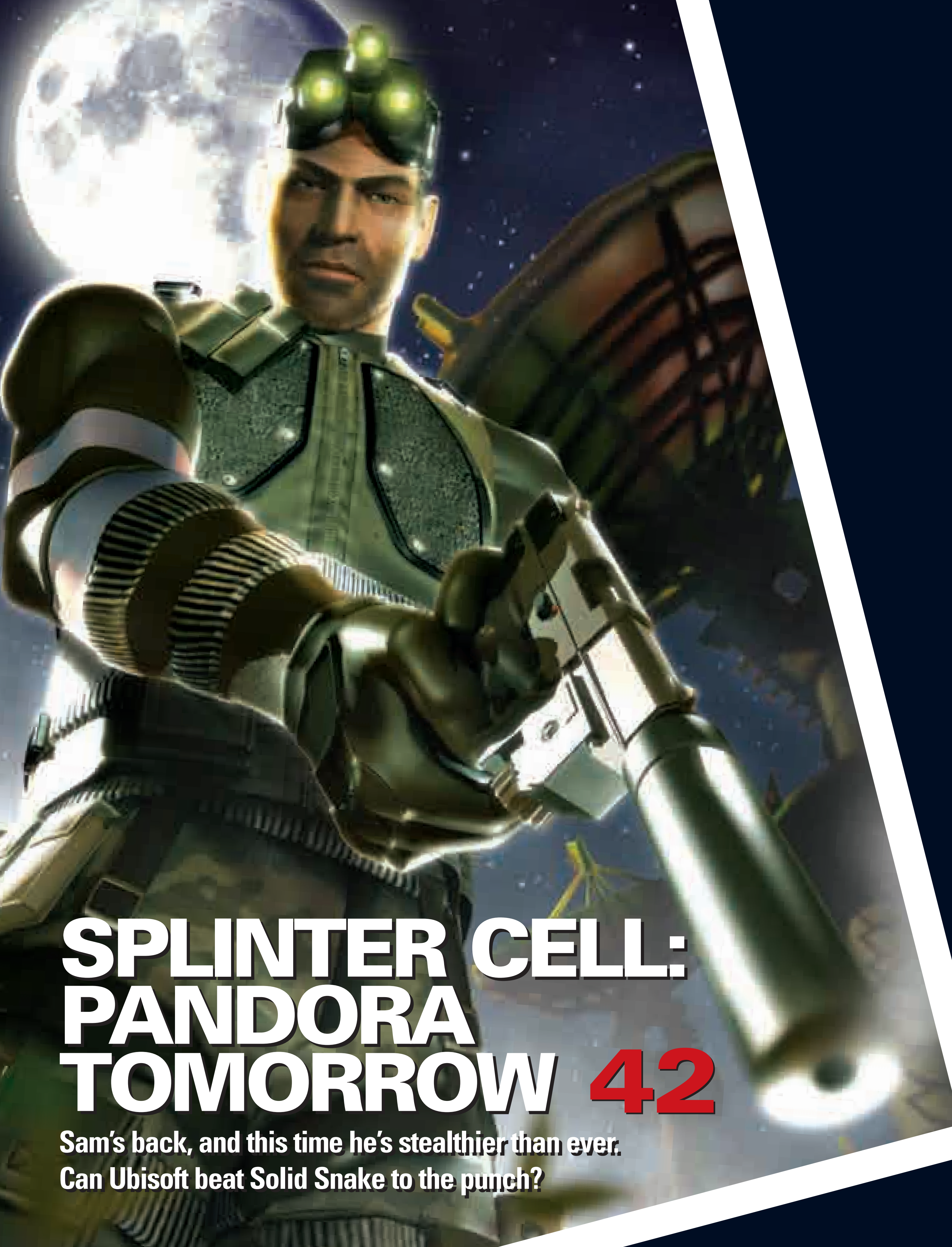
PREVIEWS

REVIEWS

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RETRO


SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW 42
Sam's back, and this time he's stealthier than ever. Can Ubisoft beat Solid Snake to the punch?



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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

FIRST PICTURES OF SONY'S PSP ARE LEAKED OVER THE INTERNET

SONY SPRINGS A LEAK

It may be called the information highway, but Sony's president Ken Kutaragi might have his own choice names for the internet after pictures of Sony's highly anticipated handheld were leaked recently. Sony's PSP was unveiled at a closed meeting in New York, but within hours the pictures had already began to appear on internet sites around the world.

Whilst this current model is obviously a prototype, it's already amazing to see just how much positive press the machine is receiving. Incredibly streamlined and looking extremely expensive, the PSP is shaping up to be on a lot of gamers' wish lists when it's eventually released in 2004. Your eyes are immediately drawn to the console's dominating 4.5-inch screen, and Sony's well-known button layout will ensure that the PSP is immediately familiar to anyone who's owned or played on any Sony console in the past.

Admittedly, the PSP's flush buttons do seem a little odd to begin with, but until we've actually got our hands on the device, we won't know how much (if at all) they will affect gameplay. The D-pad has also drawn concern from several gamers, mainly due to the fact that the machine doesn't seem to have the promised analogue stick. Again, though, this is simply a prototype and there is nothing to say that the current pad isn't an analogue model anyway.

Unsurprisingly, the PSP is already sending shockwaves throughout the gaming industry. "Having patiently watched Nintendo dominate the handheld market for so many years, Sony clearly now believes that the time is right to enter the portable sector," explains Doug Bone of games distributor Andromeda Entertainment. "The PSP's specs clearly show it to be so much more versatile than just a gaming machine, and with consumers having clearly been so happy to embrace the PlayStation format on the whole, there must be alarm bells ringing at Nintendo. Make no mistake about it, this is perhaps the most significant hardware launch since the first wave of PlayStation."

And he could be right. After all, Sony dominated the console market within a few short years of entering it. Imagine what it will be able to achieve in a new market with the PlayStation brand behind it. If ever there was a machine that has a good chance of finally taking away Nintendo's handheld crown, it has to be the PSP.



Nintendo president Satoru Iwata has so far refused to discuss the PSP's impact.



Nokia's Ilkka Raiskinen is a strong believer in the N-Gage's market power.

BETTER PULL YOUR SOCKS UP

With the console now out of the bag, it'll be interesting to see how Nintendo and Nokia will respond to Sony's new handheld threat. The mini-console market is about to heat up…

NINTENDO – GBA

STILL SITTING PRETTY WITH THE GBA BUT HOW LONG WILL ITS REIGN LAST?

Ever since Sony first revealed the PSP at this year's E3, Nintendo has refused to be drawn into making any comparisons with the new machine. While Sony and Nintendo have both stated that the two machines will be able to co-exist in the same market, it's obvious that Sony will be planning to dominate the handheld sector in the same way it has with the home consoles.

Despite Nintendo's apparent indifference towards the PSP, we're positive that it will do everything it can to undermine the machine at its expected 2004 E3 debut. We wouldn't be at all surprised if a sequel to the massively successful Game Boy Advance makes its debut sooner than Nintendo had initially planned.

Though Nintendo has had a vice-like grip on the market since its Game Boy was first released, it has never gone up against a company with the marketing savvy of Sony. Fortunately, the GBA is already well established throughout the world and Sony is definitely going to have its work cut out; the PSP may be technically superior to Nintendo's machine, but history has shown that the Game Boy brand is a firm favourite with handheld gamers the world over.

NOKIA – N-GAGE

NOKIA'S PHONE/CONSOLE HYBRID HASN'T SET THE MARKET ALIGHT YET…

Call us cynical hacks, but the outcome here seems slightly easier to predict. We can't see the N-Gage ever successfully competing against the GBA, let alone Sony's new machine. Where the N-Gage is a gamer's nightmare from a design point of view, the PSP looks anything but. Nokia's handheld appears to be aimed at people who have to own the latest piece of technological hardware (no matter how much it costs), but Sony's gorgeously sleek PSP will be highly desired by committed and casual gamers alike.

But Sony's handheld is still a way off while the N-Gage is already available and, according to Nokia, selling extremely well. Add to this the fact that the PSP doesn't seem to support the communication functions Kutaragi-san mentioned and it's quite possible that Nokia's N-Gage will be able to occupy its own space in what is becoming a rapidly expanding market.

Rumours of a new design for the N-Gage refuse to go away, and if Nokia is able to respond to feedback as quickly as Microsoft has managed with the Xbox, it's quite possible that the N-Gage could be around for some time.

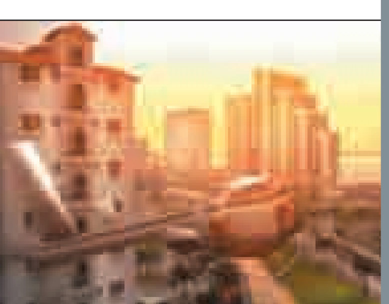
Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



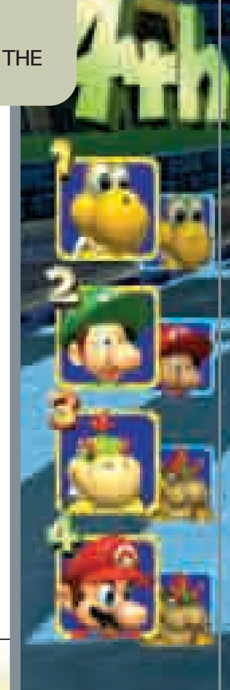
THIS TIME NEXT YEAR...

The hotly anticipated fifth instalment in the *Grand Theft Auto* series has been officially billed for release in the final quarter of 2004. Publisher Rockstar's parent company, Take 2 Interactive, broke the news while presenting its business plan for the coming year at the Annual Technology Conference in New York. The announcement will be received with mixed emotions by fans of the franchise who face a two-year wait, but can expect to be rewarded with a substantial leap forwards even by the series' impeccable standards.



MICRO-CLOSE SHOCKER

The last remnant of the once great MicroProse empire has closed its doors after finishing its final project, *Dungeons & Dragons Heroes*. The Atari-owned development studio in Hunt Valley, Maryland, was the only site to formally carry the MicroProse name following the closure of its last UK studio in September 2002. One of the most memorable independent labels of years gone by, the likes of *MicroProse Soccer* proudly bore the company name.



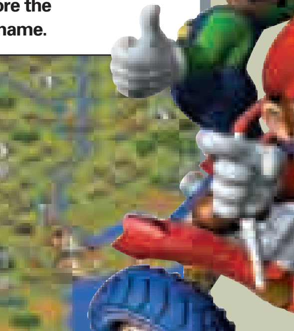


NINTENDO'S GAMECUBE FINALLY GOES ONLINE. OR DOES IT?

SET CUBE TO WARP SPEED

Ever since the GameCube was released, Nintendo has been adamant that it wouldn't follow the online path set out by Microsoft and Sony. Fortunately, several developers don't share Nintendo's sentiments and, as a result, the Cube is taking its first online steps.

Although GameSpy was one of the first companies to reveal it was working on new middleware tools to take the GameCube online, it's been beaten to the punch by the aptly named Warp Pipe project. Formed in July 2003, Warp Pipe already has *Kirby Air Ride* up and running and is currently playtesting *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* (further details can be found at www.warppipe.com). It's perhaps worth mentioning that Warp Pipe itself is not running perfectly at the moment – games tend to suffer from a low frame rate (though this was recently rectified with *Kirby Air Ride*), and there are a few problems with bugs.



But why are people investing so much time and effort in getting the GameCube online when there are only three titles (*1080° Avalanche* being the third) that can currently take advantage of it? The most obvious answer is simply because they can. "*Mario Kart* is considered by many (although not myself) to be an ideal online game," says Byron Wilkinson, news editor of *Cube* magazine. "I'd imagine Warp Pipe simply wants to realise the multiplayer potential of *Double Dash!!* better than Nintendo itself is willing to."

Another advantage to playing online is one of cost; if you want to play *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* offline but linked up, you'll need two GameCubes, two copies of the game, two GameCube Broadband Adapters and one ethernet cable to link everything together. This comes to over £200, which is a lot to pay, especially when no other titles have announced they will use LAN.

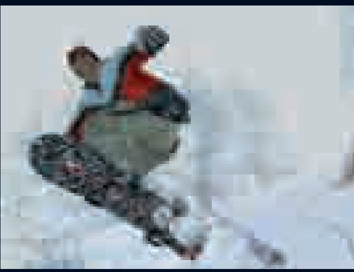
Of course, we're using a worst-case scenario, but we still can't help wondering why Nintendo cannot simply admit it might

"MARIO KART IS CONSIDERED BY MANY (ALTHOUGH NOT MYSELF) TO BE AN IDEAL ONLINE GAME"

BYRON WILKINSON, CUBE MAGAZINE



■ *1080° Avalanche* is one of the online titles, but no thanks to Nintendo. The company is reluctant to get connected.





have got this online revolution all wrong. Microsoft has already announced that its Live service now has over half a million members – pretty impressive for a service that's only been running since March. Sony's online service is also steadily building and recently set a new record when over 22,000 gamers logged on to play *SOCOM II: US Navy SEALs* at the same time.

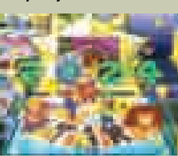
Despite all this progress, Wilkinson is convinced Nintendo has made the right decision. "Considering what type of console the GameCube is – a low-cost machine with no hard drive – Nintendo made the right choice," he says. "Broadband subscriptions across Europe are still very few in number and, perhaps most importantly, no-one has yet found a way to make providing online gaming turn much of a profit. For me, at the moment at least, online gaming is massively overhyped, as very few games are better played online than with a roomful of mates – *Double Dash!!* will still be more of a laugh in the company of people you can see rather than playing anonymously over the net."

Regardless of the GameCube's online future, Nintendo has already announced that its next console will support online gaming. Nintendo is well-known for letting other companies test a product, before it comes up with its own (sometimes superior) version. But with so many gamers embracing online gaming, it seems obvious that this is a boat Nintendo cannot afford to miss…

GAMES WE'D LOVE TO SEE ONLINE

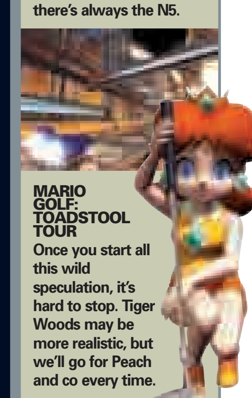
There are plenty of GameCube titles that could work online; here are just a few of them. Nintendo take note…

MARIO PARTY 4
Increase the number of players, throw away the board and concentrate on just the mini-games. With any luck, *Mario Party 6* (as and when it comes out) may do just that.



SUPER MONKEY BALL 1 & 2
Multiple monkeys online, now there's something we'd pay good money to see. SEGA's simian masterpiece would be essential online – imagine eight-player Monkey Fight…

F-ZERO GX
Racing against 29 other players in your very own customised craft? Hell, we'd settle for half as many competitors. Nevertheless, *F-Zero GX* would have been fantastic online. Still, there's always the N5.



MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR
Once you start all this wild speculation, it's hard to stop. Tiger Woods may be more realistic, but we'll go for Peach and co every time.



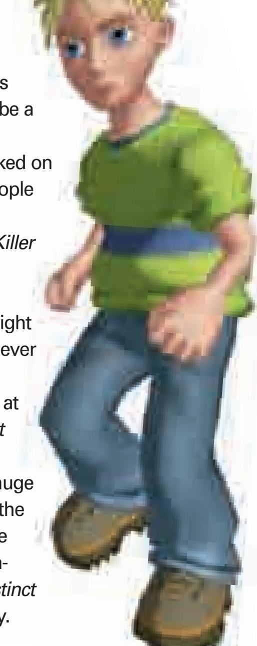
NOT ANOTHER…

RARE STORY

DOES RARE'S CURRENT GAME CONTAIN A CLUE TO THE NEXT?

With the recent cancellation of *Sabreman Stampede*, everyone has been wondering what Rare's proposed fifth title will be for Microsoft's Xbox. *Grabbed By The Ghoulies*, *Conker: Live & Uncut*, *Perfect Dark Zero* and *Kameo: Elements Of Power* have all been confirmed, but what could that mysterious last game be?

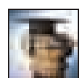
Rare's first Xbox release – *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* – may hold the answer to this gaming conundrum. Walking round Ghoulhaven Hall reveals many Rare in-jokes, ranging from *Sabre Wulf* posters to stuffed heads of Banjo and Kazooie. Make your way to the games room and not only will you find a selection of old Ultimate games, you'll also find one that's clearly marked *Killer Instinct III*.



Rare is well-known for its little jokes, but there could be a grain of truth in this latest discovery. Rare recently asked on its website which game people would most like to see on Microsoft's console and a *Killer Instinct* game garnered the most votes (not a *Banjo-Kazooie* sequel as many might have expected). Rare has never been a company to follow trends and we wouldn't be at all surprised if *Killer Instinct* turns up on Microsoft's machine next year. We're huge fans of *Banjo-Kazooie*, but the Xbox is crying out for some more high-quality beat-'em-ups. A brand new *Killer Instinct* title could fill the hole nicely.

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



MOLYNEUX'S LATEST TITLE

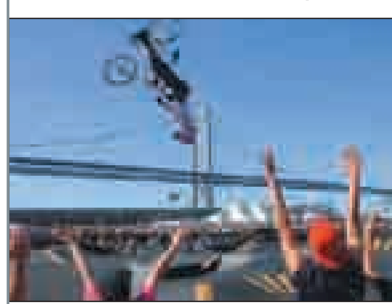
Legendary games designer Peter Molyneux has been awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Abertay Dundee in recognition of his contribution to the industry. The university is well-known for its work in the field of videogame design and technology, and wished to pay homage to the Lionhead Studios head for inventing ground-breaking gaming concepts such as *Populous* and *Theme Park*. "I am delighted that Abertay has chosen to honour me," said Molyneux, "and I hope that this will mark the start of a long and fruitful relationship."

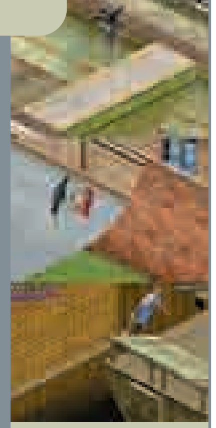




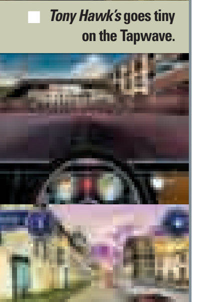
BACK ON TRACK

BMX star Dave Mirra has put his differences with Acclaim behind him, following his refusal to back trashy biking romp *BMX XXX* last year. "We are pleased to have amicably resolved this matter with Dave and anxiously look forward to resuming our successful working partnership," said Acclaim CEO Rod Cousens. Mirra will continue to endorse Acclaim's BMX games until the year 2011. "I'm glad that this issue is behind us," said Mirra. "I look forward to working with Acclaim and to continue making the best BMX games available to fans of the sport."





Tony Hawk's goes tiny on the Tapwave.



Well-known titles like *Spyhunter* can be played.

Games can be played in landscape or portrait mode, and over 19,000 applications are already available.

WILL ZODIAC TAP OUT?

IS THERE ROOM IN THE MARKET FOR YET ANOTHER HANDHELD?

What is it with the games industry these days? One minute, the GBA is quite happily shifting millions of units all on its lonesome, the next it's surrounded by a sea of potential usurpers. With all the recent fuss about the PSP (see page 8, for example), Zodiac's Tapwave launch has gone virtually unnoticed, which is a real shame, as it has the potential to become a truly cracking piece of kit.

Like the PSP and N-Gage, Zodiac's Tapwave is a multitasked machine that has all the abilities of a high-end console, as well as the power of the latest PDA. Add the fact it can double as an MP3 player, a photo viewer and a video source and you have a very desirable machine. The Tapwave also features blue-tooth technology (accommodating up to eight players at once), and the fact that the machine is based on current Palm OS technology means that over 19,000 applications are already compatible.

Several games are currently available and include the likes of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4*, *Duke Nukem Mobile* and *Stunt Car Extreme* (which gets shipped with every machine). All the titles certainly look impressive thanks to the high-resolution 480x320 pixel screen, and the Tapwave even has a built-in rumble pack.



With the ability to play games in either a landscape or portrait mode, Zodiac has clearly put a lot of thought into its new piece of hardware. Whilst the machine's current selection of games is rather limited, it's the emulation side of the machine that we're most interested in. Featuring more power than a GP32 and already receiving plenty of support on its official forum (http://tapwave.com/ community/index.asp) it's quite possible that the Tapwave may well succeed where Gamepark's GP32 has failed. As much as we adore the GP32, its front end is troublesome to say the least and also requires some fiddly registration before you can get the machine working. Many gamers were also put off by the console's somewhat cheap and plasticky feel, something that the streamline Tapwave doesn't suffer from in the slightest.

Available with either 32Mb or 128Mb of RAM and promising a battery life of around 14 hours, Zodiac's machine is much more expensive than its competitors, and with prices starting at $299.99 (£180) it's obvious that the Tapwave is aimed at the more mature gamer. But as long as the machine continues to garner interest among developers – something that Zodiac is actively encouraging by way of various design tools – we're more than happy to put our hands in our pockets and join yet another facet of the rapidly expanding handheld market.



SONY AND TOSHIBA FACE PATENT PROBLEMS OVER THE PS2'S EMOTION ENGINE

SONY GETS EMOTIONAL

Gaming-related lawsuits seem to be flying around with gay abandon at the moment, and the latest has been filed against Toshiba and Sony. While it's not as serious as Take 2 Interactive's current suit (the publisher is being sued by the family of a man who was shot by two youths who claim to have been influenced by *Grand Theft Auto)* the implications could still cause a great deal of trouble.

Brought by the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the suit claims that the PlayStation2's Emotion Engine infringes on a patent that was first filed in 1986. At the moment, not much is known about the case, and the university has not announced how much it is attempting to claim in damages. However, it has revealed that it is trying to stop the technology from being used further by either company, meaning all sorts of potential trouble for Sony should the suit succeed. Toshiba has also been targeted due to the fact it helped design the Emotion Engine and manufactured the original chips.

Of course, you have to wonder why the university has taken so long to respond to the apparent infringement and we can't help but feel that patents are currently being used as an easy way to earn a lot of money.

games™ THE TOP FIVE

FAVOURITE COMMUNICATION DEVICES



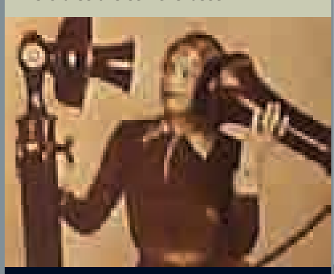
No.5 N-GAGE

It's a phone, it's a console, it's a bit lame



No.4 PHONE ON A STRING

The oldies are still the best



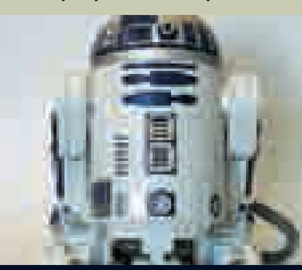
No.3 GIANT PHONES

Hello? What? You'll have to shout…



No.2 VIDEO PHONE

Swanky, sophisticated, expensive…



No.1 R2D2 PHONE

We could listen to him beep all day



TROUBLE AHEAD FOR ECTS

ELSPA PLANS TO STEAL ECTS' THUNDER WITH ITS VERY OWN TRADE SHOW

The days of wandering around a packed European Consumer Trade Show (ECTS) could very well be numbered thanks to a major new trade exhibition being launched by the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association (ELSPA). Set to take place between 1-3 September 2004, the European Games Network will be held at ExCel in London's Docklands and promises to offer the industry something completely different to the yearly ECTS.

Running alongside Game Stars Live – an 'interactive entertainment event' which will take place over the first five days of September – ELSPA's goal is to create a professional forum for the domestic and global games industry to do business. "EGN is for everyone in the business of games," revealed Roger Bennett, director general of ELSPA. "Our objective is to balance this with the needs and expectations of Europe, therefore EGN will deliver a mix of business, free of hype in a structured environment for all sectors of the games value chain."

EGN will include a range of features such as The Waterfront Rooms (a selection of over 60 dedicated meeting rooms), The Code Shop (an area for developers) and the Market Place (a large area of exhibition space). Tying all this together is The Meeting Planner, EGN's online resource that will enable anyone visiting EGN to efficiently organise their time.

Whilst we're very interested in the direction ELSPA is heading, we can't say that we're too impressed with yet another Game Stars event. The programme may have pulled in respectable viewing figures, but many hardcore gamers felt it totally demeaned its subject matter. Let's just hope next year's show is worth looking forward to.

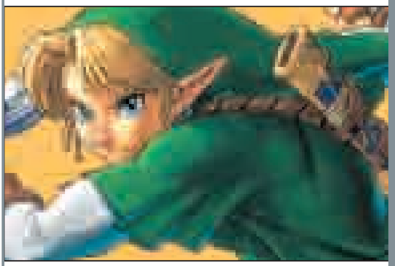


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



LINK TO THE PAST

Surely the most popular GameCube bundle at Christmas will be the £99.99 *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* deal, which also includes the highly desirable *Zelda Collector's Edition* bonus disc. The long-awaited *Zelda* compilation contains the original Eighties titles, along with complete versions of *Ocarina Of Time* and *Majora's Mask*. Cube owners in the US can also get their hands on the disc by registering their copies of selected Nintendo titles, although at the time of going to press there was no official word on a similar deal for the UK.





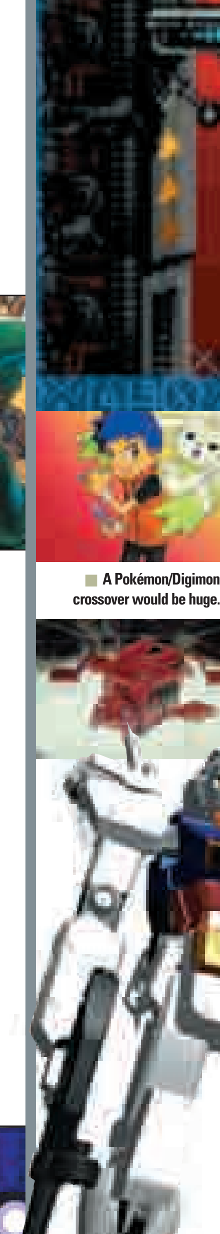
SPEED TYPING

Nyko Technologies has launched a rather handy new PlayStation2 peripheral in the US that looks set to be snapped up by the country's online gamers. The iType2 controller has been officially licensed by Sony and combines the functional configuration of the standard PlayStation2 pad with an ergonomically designed keyboard built into the casing. Retailing for just under $40 in the States, the device allows players to communicate with fellow gamers online without the interruptions of using a separate USB keyboard. A UK release for the product has yet to be confirmed.

COULD NINTENDO BE JUMPING INTO BED WITH BANDAI?

NINTENDAI?

A Pokémon/Digimon crossover would be huge.



Nintendo *Gundam* game? It might happen…

Nintendo has sparked various acquisition rumours by revealing it bought 2.7 per cent of Bandai's shares at the end of September. Both companies, however, are continuing to dismiss any possible merger. "We don't have any intention of acquiring Bandai," said a Nintendo spokesman at a recent news conference in Tokyo. "However, if some Bandai shareholders ask us to buy additional shares, we would consider the offer." Bandai's president, Takeo Takasu, was also quick to stem any rumours, stating: "Nintendo's purchase was not on a premise of any merger or equity tie-up."

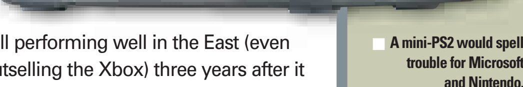
Considering that Nintendo has so far bought over 1.28 million Bandai shares that are currently worth around ¥3.4 billion (around £18 million), we can't help thinking that there's a lot more to this purchase than first meets the eye. Indeed, we are sure that the acquisition of Bandai would prove to be profitable for both companies, as they share very similar work ethics.

Bandai continues to have a huge presence in the toy industry (something that Nintendo also considers itself to be a part of) and several of its titles are currently riding high in the Japanese gaming chart. Like Nintendo's Pokémon franchise, Bandai's Digimon range is still very popular and we'd expect to see massive sales figures should a Pokémon/Digimon hybrid title ever see the light of day. Franchises like the *Gundam* series are also still incredibly popular and would certainly benefit Nintendo if the games became licensed exclusively to the GameCube and Game Boy Advance.

A combination of Bandai-based Nintendo titles coupled with Nintendo's market resources could prove to be an effective weapon (especially in Japan) and would give Nintendo some much-needed leverage against Sony. For the time being, though, we'll just have to see what develops; Bandai's stock has risen considerably since the announcements were made and it would appear that Takasu-san has no problem with any future share purchases. "We appreciate Nintendo taking our shares, which will help deepen our relationship as a business partner with Nintendo," he said. Let's hope that the Pokémon and Digimon don't start breeding…

SONY'S MINI ME

SPECULATION RISES AS SONY TRADEMARKS NEW PLAYSTATION NAMES



A mini-PS2 would spell trouble for Microsoft and Nintendo.

According to recent reports, it would appear that Sony is already considering its next piece of hardware. Before you get all excited about the prospect of owning a PlayStation3, the two trademarks Sony have applied for are PS2 and, more intriguingly, PStwo.

Of course, nothing has been officially confirmed yet and Sony continues to give out little more than a "no comment" on the recent story, but a cut-down version of the PlayStation2 could well be on the cards. It's no secret that Japanese gamers love small consoles and Sony's PSone is still performing well in the East (even outselling the Xbox) three years after it was first released.

Sony has a strong lead over its competitors and is currently outselling Microsoft's console by nearly three to one in the UK. Nintendo's GameCube fares even worse in British stores and is currently being outsold by an embarrassing six to one. Should a smaller, more compact and, most importantly, cheaper version of the console eventually see the light of day, the repercussions for Microsoft and Nintendo could be very grave indeed.

ELSPA AND EA JOIN FORCES TO PROMOTE NEW RATING SYSTEM

PEGI GETS PUSHED

The Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association (ELSPA) has joined forces with EA to promote the UK's new age-rating system for videogames. The Pan European Games Information (PEGI) standard will bring the UK into line with the rest of Europe and will replace our existing voluntary age rating system that has been in place for nine years

PEGI was actually introduced in June but this campaign has been launched to raise awareness among Christmas shoppers. "With the introduction of the PEGI system earlier this year and the many new consumers who will be buying games for Christmas presents, we felt the time was right to introduce an explanatory leaflet," said ELSPA's director general, Roger Bennett. Aiming to get the message to as many gamers as possible, ELSPA has teamed up with Electronic Arts, and has already begun distributing the new guidelines in various games.

"As the industry's leading publisher, we are very strong advocates of ensuring that the industry provides a very clear and easy-to-understand rating system for all game buyers and parents," said Paul Jackson, managing director of EA UK. While we applaud this new campaign we can't help but feel that the new PEGI system will go unnoticed by the younger gamers it's meant to be targeting. Though the scheme can only be a step in the right direction.

Roger Bennett – on a mission…

Harry Potter – on a broomstick…

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



NO.11: HAPPY FINISH FOR EVERYONE

In an industry that's rife with more willy-waving than an all-male version of *Hair*, it's not surprising that any modicum of success for a company is accompanied with numerous announcements boasting about it. This isn't unusual, but we're starting to notice a disturbing trend in the number of press releases that use clever wording and 'alternative' figures to give the impression that companies are better than they actually are.

Take Sony, for example. Now, we're not knocking the fact that the PlayStation2 is the dominant format. What is annoying is the number of announcements we've seen in the last year telling us how many consoles Sony has shipped… and yes, that's 'shipped' as in sent out to retail, not actually sold to the public. We can think of plenty of other companies who 'massage' figures by giving out less specific information, from the world domination of Nintendo's *Pokémon* to publishers spouting how game x has done better than its competitors.

To be fair, you can't blame companies for taking advantage of favourable figures. But you'd have thought that a little good old-fashioned honesty might not go amiss once in a while.

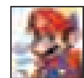


The PlayStation2 – sold absolutely tons, but shipped even more. Not surprisingly, it's this number that Sony likes to boast about.

Pokémon games have sold in their millions. Well, there are plenty in the shops, anyway…



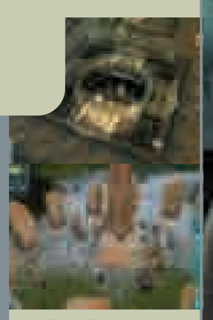
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



MARIO JUMPS PLATFORMS?

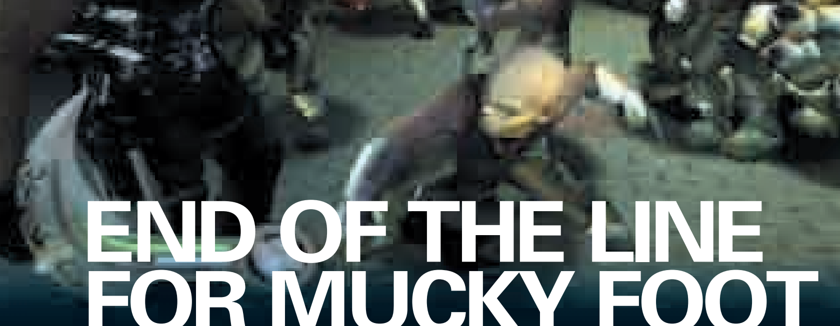
As Nintendo clears up one Mario rumour, comments made by Nintendo of America's senior vice president of marketing, George Harrison, have given rise to yet more speculation about the cheery plumber's next videogame outing. While confirming that a follow-up to last year's *Super Mario Sunshine* – known in the rumour mill as '*Mario 128*' – was indeed currently under development in Japan, Harrison refused to guarantee that the game would appear on the GameCube when it is eventually released. But with the unveiling of Nintendo's next console – the N5 – still some years away, the Cube remains the bookies' favourite to host the new Mario adventure.





Mucky Foot joins the long list of defunct UK developers.

YET ANOTHER BRITISH DEVELOPER GOES INTO LIQUIDATION



END OF THE LINE FOR MUCKY FOOT

When you're enjoying your latest console games this Christmas spare a thought for the dying breed that is the British developer. In the last year alone, several development teams have had to call it a day and the latest casualty to join what is rapidly becoming an alarmingly long list is Guildford-based Mucky Foot.

Responsible for titles such as *Startopia* and *Urban Chaos*, it would appear that the recent closure is due to the cancellation of *Bulletproof Monk* for Empire Interactive. "I was only there for a year but it's still kind of sad," explained a Mucky Foot developer who wished to remain anonymous. "The directors tried hard and the atmosphere was pretty relaxed and fun. It seems that it's getting harder and harder to be a small independent dev-co now, as no-one wants to invest in original ideas any more. Sadly, the projects we were working on weren't very exciting. I don't know what's going to happen with *Bulletproof Monk*, you'll have to ask Empire."

With so many companies disappearing at a ridiculous rate and Empire unavailable for comment on Mucky Foot's demise by the time we went to press, we have to wonder how long this trend can continue before the British games industry disappears altogether.

"say what you see"

Meaningless waffle from the industry

THIS MONTH - Nokia boasts about the initial success of the N-Gage

"We've sold around 400,000 N-Gage in the first two weeks. Sales have been very good in Europe and Asia Pacific"

games™ says: Yes, but that's how many you sold to distributors, not to the public, isn't it? You can hardly call that… Hello? Hello? Sorry, you're breaking up – it's a very bad line…

MORE FROM MR CHIPS NEXT MONTH!

NINTENDO CELEBRATES RECORD POKÉMON SALES WITH NEW GBA SP



POKÉ-PAKS UNLEASHED

Thought the Pokémon franchise couldn't get any bigger? Think again. Pikachu and his pals are still dominating all corners of the globe and continue to shift a staggering amount of games. The loveable critters have now managed to sell over five million units in Japan alone and show no signs of stopping.

In light of this, Nintendo has released some special limited-edition packs that should ensure its most successful franchise is going to be on everybody's lips come Christmas.

As well as containing a copy of either *Pokémon Ruby* or *Sapphire*, the two Pokémon Super Paks will also include a branded Pokémon case and a branded GBA SP bearing an image of either Groudon or Kyogre. With the recent UK release of *Pokémon Pinball Ruby And Sapphire*, and *Pokémon Colosseum* now out in Japan, the phenomenon still has selling power.

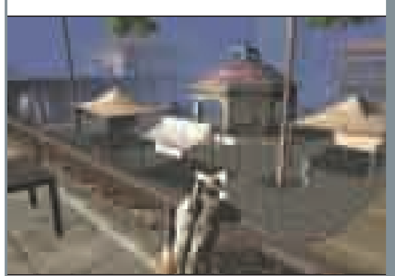


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



RECORD BREAKER

While Microsoft's Live service seems to be enjoying a warm reception from UK gamers, in the US Sony is firmly in the driving seat where the online revolution is concerned. Tactical shooter *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs* has been at the centre of the PS2's online dominance, clocking up between 11,000 and 14,500 players at a time during peak periods. Yet the release of hotly anticipated sequel *SOCOM II* saw US records being smashed within 48 hours of the first copies hitting the shelves as 22,000 gamers simultaneously logged on to get their first taste of the action.





TOMB RAIDER: THE OSIRIS CODEX

We may have been less than impressed with her PS2 outing, but Lara's escapades in the first of three new games is much more enjoyable. While the game is little more than a side-scrolling shooter, it contains plenty of nice touches and more than its fair share of simple puzzles. Let's just hope IOMO can maintain this standard.



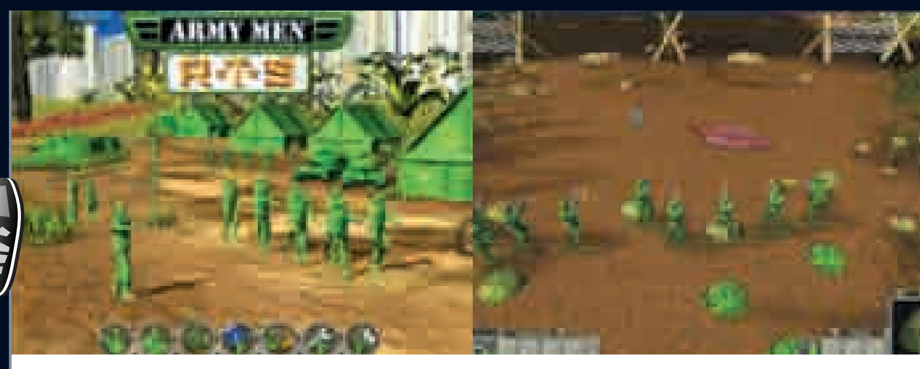
Is bigger better? Not if you're Lara it isn't…



Jonathan Swallow – a non-executive director, you know…

We've teamed up with those fine people at GAME to offer you a £3 discount voucher, thus ensuring your hard-earned cash will stretch just that little bit further. And with Christmas on the way, what better time to start saving a bit of cash here and there?





SWEET LIKE CHOCOLATE

TRIP HAWKINS IS BACK AND THIS TIME HE'S WIRELESS

Trip Hawkins, founder of 3DO, may have suffered a blow recently when the firm went into liquidation, but he has bounced back with a brand new venture. His new company, Digital Chocolate, was unveiled at the CTIA Wireless trade show in Las Vegas in October. Steering well clear of the traditional console market in which he made his fortunes, Hawkins instead has his eye on the wireless gaming sector. Unfortunately, he's not made Digital Chocolate's plans very clear yet, even though he's already promising to explore the many new directions that the format is able to offer.

Whilst Hawkins has enjoyed incredible success in his role as a founder of Electronic Arts, his last company – 3DO – was an entirely different story. He never seemed to recover from the disappointment of the 3DO console, and though we're certainly not cynical enough to suggest that Digital Chocolate may suffer the same fate, insiders are sure to be watching every step the company makes with great interest…

IOMO CAPTURE A SWALLOW

MOBILE GAMING VISIONARY JOINS IOMO BOARD

Jonathan Swallow has become the non-executive director of mobile game developer IOMO. Swallow was previously the co-founder of Purple Software – one of the pioneers of the mobile entertainment sector.

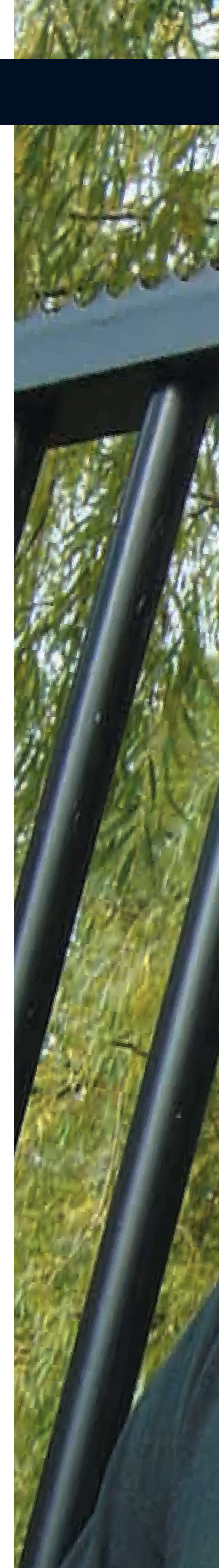
IOMO has been at the forefront of the mobile games industry for the past year and has delivered many popular brands and licences including *Tiger Woods PGA Tour Golf*, *Scooby Doo* and *Tomb Raider: The Osiris Codex*. The company is expected to benefit greatly from Swallow's guidance.

"We're delighted to welcome Julian on-board," said John Chasey, managing director of IOMO. "His experience in the mobile sector is unmatched and he has worked with many of the world's leading companies in establishing mobile entertainment as a viable new gaming platform."

Swallow himself is pleased with his new position and predicts great things. "Mobile entertainment is a unique and exciting area," he said. "It has grown to a vibrant global industry in a few years and we have already seen the successful introduction of simple downloadable games. Advances such as multiplayer gaming, location information and new forms of interaction will have a considerable impact in the near future."

"WE WOULD NEVER RELEASE A SEQUEL WHICH WAS JUST A BUNCH OF NEW LEVELS WITH NO IMPROVEMENT TO THE UNDERLYING GAME"

STEVE ELLIS, FREE RADICAL DESIGN



STEVE ELLIS

FREE RADICAL DESIGN

While many of us had our first gaming experiences with a ZX Spectrum, for Steve Ellis it was the start of a lifelong obsession. The co-founder and head of software at Free Radical Design, Ellis has come a long way since that Christmas when his parents thought a computer would make a great present for Steve and his brothers. But it hasn't all been fun and games. Learning to program BASIC and Pascal at evening courses, Ellis achieved an O-Level and A-Level in computing, before studying computing science at Staffordshire University. "Since I started programming, I've always liked the idea of making games," he says. "For some reason, though, I always saw it as more of a hobby than a career goal – perhaps I didn't expect to be able to get paid to do something that's so much fun. I never gave it any serious consideration until I was at university – my dull year-long work placement helped me decide that commercial programming wasn't what I wanted to do, so I applied for games programming jobs."

Having started Free Radical Design just a few years ago, Ellis has been busy recently. As well as getting this bold new company up and running, he and his colleagues were among the first to master the infamously problematic PlayStation2 architecture – their first project, *TimeSplitters*, was ready in time for the launch of Sony's hardware. But while other developers were complaining that it was impossible to get a respectable performance from the machine, Ellis remembers things a little differently. "I enjoyed working on *TimeSplitters*, because at the time the PS2 hardware was new and exciting. We were building absolutely all of our technology and tools from the ground up, so it was a fun time." The results were undeniably impressive – the game ran at 60 frames per second, as well as being perhaps the only piece of PS2 software to feature textures anywhere near as crisp as those seen on the Dreamcast.

Furthermore, the gameplay was reminiscent of *GoldenEye* on the Nintendo 64, right down to the sublime multiplayer mode. Of course, many of Free Radical's staff are ex-Rare employees, which goes some way to explaining why there were so many similarities between *TimeSplitters* and Rare's classic title. "I joined Rare just before graduating from uni, and worked on *GoldenEye 007* and *Perfect Dark*," says Ellis. "Most notably, I added the multiplayer feature to *GoldenEye*, starting work on it only five months before the game's release."

Despite quickly moving through the ranks at Rare, though, Ellis was keen to start his own company. "I'd been considering it for a long time," he says, "probably even before starting at Rare and meeting the other guys who ultimately co-founded FRD. That said, it was a difficult decision to actually go through with – at Rare I was paid reasonably well and my future seemed secure but I was choosing to throw that all away and take a much riskier path." And sometimes that path must have seemed particularly tricky.

Following the massive success of *TimeSplitters*, the company immediately began working on a sequel, not only for release on Sony's machine, but also on Xbox and GameCube – three very different pieces of hardware. Even so, Ellis points out that "console development is all about compromises – you identify the limitations and work within them. Over time, you learn how to get more performance out of the same hardware, but those improvements are only ever marginal and you always look forward to the next generation." Irrespective of these 'compromises', *TimeSplitters 2* turned out to be one of the highlights of last year, bettering the original in just about every way possible. "We are constantly striving to improve the quality of our games," says Ellis. "We would never release a sequel which was just a bunch of new levels with no improvement to the underlying game. We keep an eye on critical and user-level feedback, and try to address issues that we agree with."

Despite being such a great game, though, *TimeSplitters 2* wasn't the commercial success that it should have been – especially in America. "One of the lessons that we learned was the importance of the publisher's role in ensuring the success of a game," Ellis remarks. "Casual gamers don't all read games magazines, so having a critically successful game doesn't necessarily guarantee commercial success." And he has a point – just look at *Ico*, *Fatal Frame* and *Panzer Dragoon Orta* for proof of that. But with a new project in the works for release next year and an astute team of creative individuals on board, it's obvious that Free Radical is quickly becoming one of the UK's premier developers.



TAMING THE PLAYSTATION2, CREATING ONE OF THE BEST MULTIPLAYER GAMES AROUND, WORKING WONDERS WITH GOLDENEYE, NOT TO MENTION FOUNDING FREE RADICAL DESIGN… STEVE ELLIS HAS PROVED HE'S ONE TO WATCH



WITH CHRISTMAS ALMOST UPON US, HIGH-STREET STORES ARE GETTING READY TO SHIFT HUGE NUMBERS OF CONSOLES. BUT DO THEY KNOW WHAT THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT? WE GO UNDERCOVER TO FIND OUT WHAT NEW GAMERS MIGHT FIND IN THEIR STOCKINGS.

As the cogs of consumerism start turning in the run-up to Christmas, the games industry looks to be onto a winner. The combination of gaming's growing popularity and consoles' low prices could see record sales of hardware and software. But for people who are new to gaming, deciding which console to buy can be confusing. And if they find games shops too intimidating they may turn to a non-specialist store, or perhaps a supermarket.

While hardcore gamers bemoan the 'casual' gamers who have helped the PlayStation2 become the most popular console in the UK, what is it that has caused the machine's vast sales? Advertising helps, but what about on a more fundamental level? What advice are people being given when they visit a high-street store to buy a console? And with some shops now no longer stocking the GameCube, is it possible to get impartial advice?

Posing as an utterly clueless non-gamer looking to buy a console for an early-20-something brother, we visited four national retail chains to see what console they'd recommend to a first-time buyer.

THE HARD SELL

TRIED AND TESTED

HMV

- **More than 160 stores nationwide**
- **Primarily a music store, also sells DVDs, videos, games, consoles, books and magazines**

First stop – a large, city-centre branch of the well-known music store. The games were tucked away in an enclave on the first floor, and all three consoles were represented though the GameCube had less shelf space than the PS2 and Xbox (on a visit to a smaller branch of the store, no GameCube consoles or games were available).

When an assistant was asked if the GameCube was a good deal because it was only £79.99, he implied that the only reason it was cheap was because it was unpopular. Would it be suitable for an early-20-something bloke? Not really, as it was more for kids, we were told. This guy clearly wasn't a fan.

When it came to the PS2 and Xbox, there wasn't much in it, apart from the assistant's obvious enthusiasm when talking about his own Xbox. Xbox Live was explained fairly clearly, and he mentioned the DVD functions of the PS2 and Xbox without prompting – perhaps unsurprising for a store that sells CDs and DVDs. He also outlined the extras needed for the online or DVD features (headsets, DVD remotes, modems and so on).

On balance, the Xbox came out on top, with its superior power and the assistant's enthusiasm winning the day. Interestingly, this was the only shop where we were advised to find out a little more about what the console's prospective owner might be looking for before shelling out our cash.



RECOMMENDED:
Xbox, but only just

"ON BALANCE, THE XBOX CAME OUT ON TOP, WITH ITS SUPERIOR POWER AND THE ASSISTANT'S ENTHUSIASM WINNING THE DAY"

"ALL THE STAFF WERE HELPFUL, THOUGH SOME OF THEIR ADVICE MAY HAVE BEEN A LITTLE BIT IN-DEPTH FOR A GENUINE GAMES NOVICE"

GAMESTATION

- **Over 100 stores nationwide**
- **Videogames retailer selling new and used games and consoles**

As the only 'specialist' store we visited, it was no surprise that Gamestation gave reasonably equal space to all 'big three' consoles (even if the Xbox and PS2 areas were more prominent). There were dozens of bundles available, even for the GameCube, and we were told that if we couldn't see one we wanted then each store could create packages at its discretion.

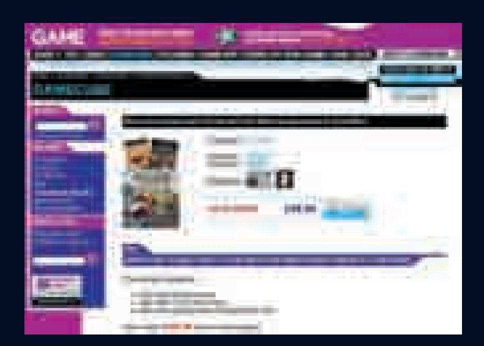
Despite the apparent support for the GameCube, it was given rather short shrift, though not completely dismissed. Described as more of a 'beginners' console, we were told it was fine if you preferred more cartoony games or wanted to play franchises like Mario. The Xbox triumphed over the PS2 again, with superior speed and online capabilities (though with fewer games). We were given plenty of warning about the extras needed for the consoles' additional functions (DVD playback or going online) and were reassured that if something went wrong with our Xbox then Microsoft would be happy to fix it. We were also told not to worry about our new console going out of date, as we'd be lucky to see the PS3 before 2005 and the Xbox had plenty of life left in it.

All the staff were knowledgable and helpful, though some of their advice may have been a little bit in-depth for a genuine games novice. They were also patient when it came to stupid questions ('Can you play DVDs in a GameCube?') and gave us the store's number if we had any more queries.

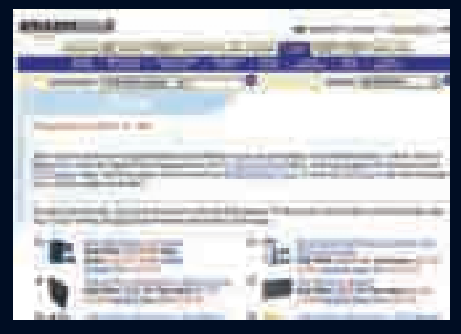


RECOMMENDED:
Xbox, with some authority

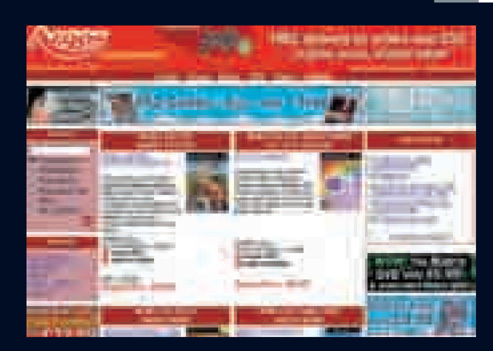
HAPPY ONLINE SHOPPER THE BEST PLACES TO LOOK IF YOU'RE AFTER AN ONLINE BARGAIN



GAME (www.game.uk.com)
As you'd expect, GAME has the majority of the best deals around – although to be fair, the games being packaged together in some cases are a little suspect. Still, at least any games you get for free can be used as trade-ins against better titles after the New Year.



AMAZON (www.amazon.co.uk)
Rather than having any killer set deals, Amazon lets you build your own pack with plenty of savings – everything's at least £10 cheaper than on the high street, meaning you're sure to get some good games. What's more, orders over £25 are shipped free.



ARGOS (www.argos-entertainment.co.uk)
Despite having its own dedicated online site for entertainment goodies, Argos doesn't appear to sell consoles online. Instead, it focuses on just the games, and as such, there are plenty of deals to be found. You'll just have to look hard to find them…

MVC

- Nearly 90 stores nationwide
- Sells CDs, DVDs, videos, consoles and games

The gaming shelves of MVC seemed to reflect the popularity of various consoles, with PS2 titles and consoles taking up more space than the Xbox and GameCube combined. The GameCube was stuck in the corner with the least space of all, though the new low price was displayed fairly prominently. The assistant was extremely helpful and seemed disappointed at having to explain that the GameCube might not be the best choice (a fact he put down to a lack both of games and general industry support).

Yet again, the Xbox emerged the favourite, with its superior power and lower price (compared to the PS2). It also had a better bundle than the PS2, with *Halo*, *Midtown Madness 3* and *Splinter Cell* available with an Xbox for £139.99.

Halo and *Splinter Cell* were raved about, though there was less enthusiasm for *Midtown Madness 3*. Rather refreshingly, when asked about games for either machine, the assistant said the PS2 had the most games, a lot of which were good, though he warned there were a lot of duff titles on Sony's console. This was the only instance of the quality of the PS2 games being mentioned.

Any worries about our new console being obsolete in a few months were laid to rest. We were told the PS3 was being thought about but wouldn't appear until 2005, and that the Xbox would be fine for ages. The assistant's admission that he was an Xbox owner served to reinforce his recommendation, as did his willingness to check for forthcoming deals as well as the fact he gave us his name and said to call the shop if we had any more questions.



RECOMMENDED: Xbox, enthusiastically and honestly

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

- Xbox rules, PS2 sucks, GameCube RIP. Or words to that effect.
- The majority of people who sell consoles own Xboxes. One assistant said he bought a PS2 but now regrets it.
- Staff in non-specialist stores sometimes know as much as those in specialist stores. Or at least the people we spoke to did…
- Shop around for deals as the same amount of money can get you very different bundles.
- Console manufacturers are onto a money-spinner by only packaging one controller with their machines…
- PS2 online is unlikely to eclipse Xbox Live.
- Xbox and PS2 have so many games that people have lost count (nor can they remember which console has more titles).
- Don't go shopping for games during half term. Unless you like being jostled by pre-teens…

DIXONS

- More than 300 stores nationwide
- Electrical retailer, primarily domestic appliances, as well as consoles and games

We took in two branches of Dixons – one large, one small. The bigger branch carried a few GameCube games but no consoles. We were simply told that Dixons 'does not support the GameCube'. The assistant explained some of the technical differences between the PS2 and Xbox (not particularly clearly), though refused to plump for a favourite. He mentioned that the PS2 had 400-500 games available, but would not comment on their quality.

The smaller branch was far more helpful, though there was no GameCube presence at all – the implication being that it was on the way out as developers weren't making games for it any more. Xbox emerged the clear favourite, though PS2 and Xbox both had competitive bundles on offer. Microsoft's machine was described as 'twice as powerful' as the PS2, and its online capabilities were preferred to those of Sony's console (the Xbox Live concept was also explained extremely well).

The Xbox was also recommended in terms of longevity – we were told that the PS3 was in development (but wouldn't appear for at least 18 months) while the Xbox now had Linux capabilities, effectively making it a PC and therefore endlessly upgradeable.

The assistant didn't seem keen on the EyeToy, and doubted it would be suitable for our intended recipient. He also said that though the Xbox and PS2 had many games in common, the Xbox was still superior with better unique games (particularly *Halo*) and that Microsoft's machine currently had more games being released for it than the PS2.



RECOMMENDED: Xbox, by a long way (in one branch, anyway)

BETTER VALUE GAMING

By now you probably know that Santa doesn't climb down the chimney and deliver you lovely free presents – it all costs money. However, those kind retailers are more than happy to try to tempt you to part with your cash by offering many fantastic offers that can save you loads of money. Remember that it's worth shopping around, especially at the indies, as some retailers will match or better a rival store's deals, but only if you ask nicely.

HMV

XBOX: £129.99 – available in a package for £139.99 with *Halo*, *Midtown Madness 3* and an extra controller

GAMECUBE: £79.99

PLAYSTATION2: £139.99
PLUS: £10 off any game over £29.99 when you buy an Xbox, PlayStation2 or GameCube

MVC

XBOX: £129.99, or £139.99 for Xbox plus *Halo*, *Midtown Madness 3* and *Splinter Cell*

GAMECUBE: £79.99 (no offers)

PLAYSTATION2: £139.99 or £149.99 for PS2 and *FIFA 2004*

Dixons

XBOX: £139.99 for Xbox, *Halo*, *Midtown Madness 3*, *Quantum Redshift*. £159.99 for Xbox, games as above plus one of either *Tiger Woods 2004*, *Rugby 2004*, *Freedom Fighters*, *Conflict: Desert Storm*, *FIFA 2004*. £199.99 for Xbox, *Halo*, *Midtown Madness 3*, *Quantum Redshift*, *FIFA 2004*, *Splinter Cell*, Universal speakers.

PLAYSTATION2: £139.99 for PS2 and *International Cue Club*. £169.99 for PS2, *FIFA 2004* and one other game. £199.99 for PS2, *International Cue Club*, racing sim, *FIFA 2004*, *Tiger Woods 2004*, Universal speakers

Gamestation

XBOX: £124.99, or £149.99 for an Xbox and game of your choice. £139.99 for an Xbox, one controller, *Halo*, *Midtown Madness 3*, *Hitman 2*, *Conflict: Desert Storm* and two-month Xbox Live trial

GAMECUBE: £79.99, or it's available in bundle with GB Player and any game for £136.99

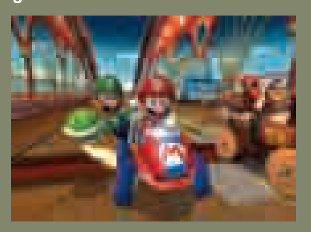
PLAYSTATION2: £159.99 with any full-price game, or Silver PS2 with a Platinum game for £149 (or Silver PS2 with full-price game for £169.99)

Please Note: Offers printed here were correct at time of going to press and may be subject to regional variation. Other offers may be available and can change or be withdrawn at the discretion of the retailer. These examples are intended to be a representative guide to what's on offer, not a definitive list.

FIVE FOR CHRISTMAS

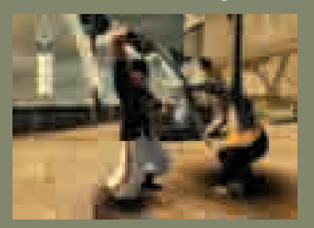
5 MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

■ Bright, colourful and fun to play, *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* offers a good selection of tracks and modes.



4 PRINCE OF PERSIA

■ Ubisoft shows everyone how to resurrect a classic game in style. This should test nimble fingers…



3 PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

■ With new graphics, realistic animation and improved gameplay, this will keep sports fans happy.



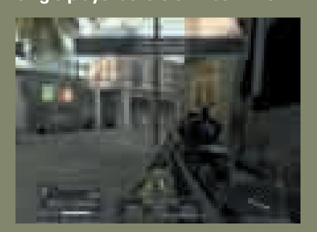
2 PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

■ With better gameplay than *Gran Turismo*, *PGR2* blends realism with fun. Great on Xbox Live.



1 RAINBOW SIX 3

■ With some of the best visuals on the Xbox, *RS3* is just as good in single-player as it is on Xbox Live.



HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE…

It's fine finding out what the sales staff think, but who tells them what to tell us? Do console manufacturers keep an eye on bundles and shelf space, or is it up to the stores' discretion? And do staff find out about new products direct from the manufacturer or has all that sales patter been culled from what their mate told them down the pub?

SONY

When it comes to putting bundles together, Sony will make some itself while leaving others up to individual stores. "In the case of triple-A titles (like *GT4*) it's in Sony's interest to put a bundle together," says a company spokeswoman. "Likewise, retailers sometimes put their own bundles together because it's in their best interests."

Sony takes a "proactive" approach to educating shop staff, sending the 'PS2 Crew' out to stores. This team of 30 people explains new products to everyone from games buyers to sales staff in independent shops. Games demos are also sent out, and a quarterly booklet is given to retailers to tell them what key titles are due.

"Ninety-nine per cent of the time it's in the interest of the retailer to make sure their staff are swotted up on products," said Sony's spokeswoman. Point of sale is also important, with items such as an in-store leaftlet explaining about the EyeToy. Sony spends "a lot of money" on educating retail staff.

"NINETY-NINE PER CENT OF THE TIME IT'S IN THE INTEREST OF THE RETAILER TO MAKE SURE THEIR STAFF ARE SWOTTED UP ON PRODUCTS"

MICROSOFT

As with Sony, some of Microsoft's bundles are decided by the manufacturer, some by the retailer. At the moment, Microsoft only offers one bundle – an Xbox, one controller, *Midtown Madness 3*, *Halo* and a two-month Live preview for £139.99. "All other bundles are done through the store themselves, hence why there is such a range," explains a Microsoft spokeswoman.

Again, like Sony, Microsoft likes to "keep in regular contact with store staff through a variety of ways". A field team visits shops to keep staff up to date with new releases and information, while retail newsletters and training guides are distributed either by the field team or head office. "We also have retail conferences where we present our new games and marketing plans," the spokeswoman said.

"MICROSOFT LIKES TO "KEEP IN REGULAR CONTACT WITH STORE STAFF THROUGH A VARIETY OF WAYS""

NINTENDO

Like its competitors, Nintendo will decide the content of some bundles while leaving others up to the discretion of individual chains or stores. The latest official bundle consists of a GameCube, *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* and a *Legend Of Zelda: Collector's Edition* disc containing five *Zelda* games.

As with the other manufacturers, Nintendo takes an active role in teaching retailers about its new products. It attends retail conferences to discuss its hardware and software with store managers, and works with retailers' head offices to make sure product information is included on staff bulletins and newsletters.

"Our field merchandising team also go directly into stores to talk with staff and answer any questions they may have," explains Shelly Pearce of Nintendo UK. "And we produce game demo discs which give the store staff an opportunity to play the games." Nintendo also sends information direct to retail staff to let them know about upcoming titles.

"OUR FIELD MERCHANDISING TEAM GO DIRECTLY INTO STORES TO TALK WITH STAFF AND ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS THEY MAY HAVE"



LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"RANDY AT THE LOCAL GAME STORE IS, AS WELL AS I CAN DEDUCE, WARMLY AND SOON LOCKED IN PASSIONATE CONVERSATION

Manic company zealot and Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer shall drink his next shot of retina-expanding, vein-burning, brain-snapping, supercharged quad espresso on me: I have taken my last acquiescent glance at the sun and moved, irretrievably, into shadow. Where once there stood a black-and-blue tower of Japanese ingenuity and vision, there now sits a bloated black-and-green heap of raw American muscle. Sweet sounds of a thousand varied adventures – a hero's fanfare, a siren's song, a beast's call – no longer meet the ears of those passing by. Now, there is only the biting, cacophonous howl of gunfire splitting the air. So much gunfire.

The odd thing about buying an Xbox is that I swore I never would. From its detested corporate source, to the faltering, PC-error-spitting demo model shown by Microsoft's rep before launch, to a catalogue dominated (until recently) by dull multiformat fare and a hundred soulless sports titles, everything just said 'no'. Then came The Convincer in the form of *Rainbow Six 3*, followed by a bug-fixed re-release of *Morrowind* a few days later, with *Deus Ex: Invisible War* due before Christmas and (god willing) *Half-Life 2* in the new year. Finally, offering the best of the PC world without the compatibility issues or upgrade spiral (and in an armchair setting), Xbox had found itself.

And at just $179 (£107), it had also found me.

Tom Clancy has done many things in his life, including persuading anti-Microsoft gamers to buy Xboxes…

Of course, I'd assumed we were getting the best possible deal here, as we do on so many things. Such snobbish contentment was unfounded though. There is just one bundle and no matter who you buy it from, this is the present package: Xbox, Controller-S, two months' free Live access and one disc with *Tetris Worlds Live* and *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* on it. Microsoft sends them out this way; no retailer dares offer anything different. It didn't take long for news to reach me of the UK's latest deal proffering *Halo* and *Midtown Madness 3*; an already outstanding proposition trumped in short order by Game's stupendous *Halo*/*MM3*/*Medal Of Honor*/*TimeSplitters 2* package. While we get – let me reiterate – *Tetris* and *Clone Wars*. Can you think of two games less suited to demonstrating the power of Xbox? *Star Wars* stutters, showing off only the Xbox's ability to render brown; *Tetris* is, well, just *Tetris*.

Now, at £140 ($235) Britons do pay a bit more for their superior packs, but when you consider that *Halo* (which has oh-so-surprisingly avoided the budget range worldwide) is an absolute requirement of the new Xbox owner, you lot are far and away getting the deal of the world this Xboxmas. Demonstrating the uncontrolled growth of a seed planted years ago, when I thought my dear mum might 'quite enjoy' a Pocket Game Boy with *Tetris*, even she has taken advantage of the Game deal. When mums are buying consoles, your pricing is sound.

I can, however, take small consolation in the famous



MY BEST FRIEND. I AM GREETED ABOUT FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS"

American 'service-with-a-smile' I received during this time. You'll have noticed that it is rare to encounter a British videogame store employee (I refer here to the chain stores, of course, not the independents) who isn't so uninformed that you wish to garrotte him with the nearest ethernet cable, yes? Not so here. Randy at the local GameStop is, as well as I can deduce, my best friend. It all started when, like some holy retribution for choosing the Left-Hand Path, the first Xbox I brought home seemed to greatly prefer saying 'Your Xbox does not recognise this disc' much more than making games appear on my telly. To which I always replied, hilariously, "Why not? It saw the same disc not two minutes ago." Back at the store I was greeted warmly, treated like a brother, and soon locked in passionate conversation about first-person shooters, present and future. Randy mentioned that, having served in the military, it was his opinion that *R6* is the first game to get nightvision 'right.' New Xbox, all smiles, perfect.

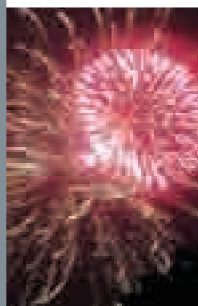
Later I dropped by because I'd forgotten to grab my *Rainbow Six 3* companion disc. "Sorry you had to come back for that," said Randy, foisting upon me conciliatory gifts such as playable demos and a cute little gyroscopic Mega Man clock. Do you see? You may have saved a considerable amount of money, but I've got a little blue clock and an ex-marine who loves me. Hang on…

Many thanks



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Guy Fawkes Night



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Thanksgiving



WANT ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE SHAPE? THEN DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net HE MIGHT LISTEN, IF YOU'RE LUCKY

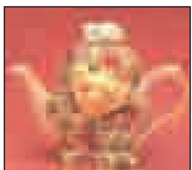
AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

CHRISTMAS TREE SHOPS

This 24-store New England chain is open, would you believe, all year round. Nobody really goes for a Christmas tree, but should you need a teapot shaped like an armchair for under $3…





US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Multi
2	WWE Smackdown! Here Comes The Pain	THQ	PS2
3	Conflict: Desert Storm II	SCi	Multi
4	The Simpsons: Hit And Run	Vivendi	Multi
5	Madden NFL 2004	EA Sports	Multi
6	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami	Multi
7	Jak II: Renegade	Sony	PS2
8	NBA Live 2004	EA Sports	Multi
9	SpongeBob Squarepants: Battle For Bikini Bottom	THQ	PS2
10	Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike	Activision	GC

(Updated 7/11/03)

T.H.U.G.

WWE Smackdown!

games™ JAPAN REPORT

KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"IT'S UNTRUE THAT THE JAPANESE DON'T LOVE THE XBOX. AT THE INTO THREE JAPANESE GUYS WHO LOVED THE XBOX LIKE A HEAVY

Part of the reason the Xbox doesn't sell in Japan, people will tell you (maybe as a joke), is because it's so big the Japanese don't have room for it in their apartments. I say that's a joke because I've lived in a Japanese apartment and it would have easily accommodated at least two Xboxes. I'll tell you it's untrue, too, that the Japanese don't dig the Xbox, because at this year's Tokyo Game Show, my friend and I ran into three Japanese guys (perhaps best described as 'dudes') who loved the Xbox like a heavy little brother. They were waiting in line at the front desk because they'd heard the same rumour we had – if you show up at the Xbox booth with an Xbox logo somewhere on your clothing, you get a free bag containing a free two-month Xbox Live start-up kit and an Xbox Live pillow.

These guys had no trouble getting their free bags – my friend and I did. We took pamphlets, tore off Xbox logos and slipped them into our press badges, to no avail; the girl at the counter looked at us like we were The Devil split in two. These three dudes were all wearing Xbox apparel and sporting regular attendee badges. My friend asked one of the dudes if he could borrow his *Steel Battalion* shirt and the dude complied, stripping to a bare torso. Another guy stripped off his Xbox Summer Party soccer jersey and gave it to me. We slid on our shirts, and received our bags.

We were then told by the PR girl to not do such a thing again, making a big 'X' with her hands as she did – that's the Japanese way of saying 'no more'. We made Xs back and screamed: "The ladies love the Xbox, too!" The dudes thought this was hilarious, and rightly so.

So why do you guys love the Xbox so? I asked them. "It's the future," one dude said, eyes glinting. "Sony makes you pay for a hard drive and a modem and all that – Xbox has got it all packed in." This first dude, later talk revealed, was a rabid PC gamer.

"I like the feel of the controller," his friend chipped in. "It's so solid. It feels like I'm holding a gun." I imagined this guy hanging out at the gun range on the top floor of Akihabara's AsoBitCity, after his all-night part-time job had ended.

"I love Xbox Live. I love it!" This third dude played in an amateur bowling league on days off from his office job.

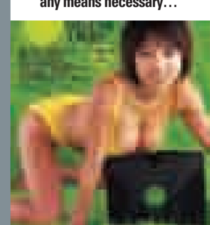
"*Halo* is, like, the best game ever," the first dude added with a quiet, Japanese reflexive tone. "It's a miracle." So you've seen the new *Halo 2* video? "THERE'S A NEW *HALO 2* VIDEO?!"

Well, there wasn't really – just a little documentary thing. Subtitled talks with developers abounded; some new shots of aliens and vehicles and weapons delighted these Xbox fans. There's a part where one of the producers says that *Halo* was 'about 30 seconds of fun, repeated.' He mentions how you can have all the graphics and sound in the world, yet if you don't

■ Microsoft should be proud that these guys, their entire Japanese Xbox fanbase, are so enthusiastic.



■ It seems that the Xbox is being promoted in Japan by any means necessary…



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON THIRTEEN: GETTING INTO TROUBLE

Oh, I'm sorry! That's a little not good!	Aa, sumimasen! Sore wa chotto dame desu!
Hm, I wasn't planning to steal it or anything.	Ee, nusumu tsumori wa naindayo.
Hey! What the hell are you doing?	EE?! Naniwo yatterunda?
Um, I kind of don't speak Japanese.	Anou, Nihongo . . . chotto wakarnaiyo.
Liar!	Usotsuke!
Thief!	Dorobou!

TOKYO GAME SHOW I RAN LITTLE BROTHER”

nail that 30 seconds, you don't have a videogame. This impressed Junichi, the *Halo* fan: “These American game designers can be both philosophical and businesslike at the same time. It's great, truly great.”

The second dude announced: “We'll be online every night.” What about *True Fantasy Live Online*? I asked. The third dude waved away my suggestion. “I don't want to play a Japanese online RPG. Now, if they made *Ragnarok Online* for Xbox, I'd be all over that.” Have you seen Game Dragon's *Young Gatt*? I asked him. Game Dragon is a Taiwanese developer; *Young Gatt* is their fledgling project, a beauteous little MMORPG that debuts on Xbox here in Japan around now, and also happened to be my personal ‘Game of the Show’. “I can't believe someone else has heard of *Young Gatt*!”

So there you have it – at Tokyo Game Show 2003, I found a whole crew of Japanese people who accept non-Japanese game design sensibilities.

“Except the N-Gage. That thing's a joke, man.”

Kind regards



Sonic Heroes – not tough with invisible characters…

BAD FIRST IMPRESSION

At one point during a demo of the slightly-more-complete *Sonic Heroes,* I got stuck. It turned out I had to use the flying formation in a certain place – a female SEGA employee behind me stepped in and showed me this after I failed 17 times.

“Thanks,” I told her. I then flew a little bit… and then Tails disappeared from the screen.

My friend and I thought this was hilarious; I was flying, but Tails was nowhere to be seen. The SEGA woman was a little freaked out by this – she took the controller out of my hand, and tweaked around a bit. Tails just refused to reappear.

“Before you release the game,” I joked, “please search for Tails a little more.” The woman scoffed at my comment. She then went on to complete the last three-quarters of the level without looking back.

When she turned around to face me, she had a sick little grin on her face. “It's not even my game,” she said, before walking away. It was then that I realised she was *Skies Of Arcadia* lead producer Rieko Kodama. Oops.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	NARUTO: Narutimate Hero	Bandai	PS2
2	The Super Dimension Fortress Macross	Bandai	PS2
3	Made In Wario	Nintendo	GC
4	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: TAOD	Eidos	PS2
5	Oriental Blue	Nintendo	GBA
6	Front Mission 1st	Square Enix	PS2
7	Grand Theft Auto III	Capcom	PS2
8	Way Of The Samurai	Spike	PS2
9	The King Of Fighters	SNK	PS2
10	NECCHU! Pro Baseball 2003: Autumn Night Games Festival	Namco	PS2

(Updated 26/10/03, ©2003 Media Create Co. Ltd, All Rights Reserved)


NARUTO: Narutimate Hero
The Super Dimension Fortress Macross
Oriental Blue

MOST PEOPLE WOULD BE HAPPY WITH A DECENT SPELL AT A SINGLE HIGH-PROFILE COMPANY, BUT NOT JAMES VEEVAERT. WITH TIME AT SIERRA AND INTERPLAY UNDER HIS BELT, HE'S NOW WORKING WITH MICROSOFT'S LATEST ACQUISITION. HE'S CLEARLY GOING PLACES…



"CREATING INNOVATIVE CONTENT DEMANDS HIRING GREAT TALENT, WHICH SHOULD BE A PRIORITY FOR PUBLISHERS AND DEVELOPERS ALIKE"

JAMES VEEVAERT, RARE

JAMES VEEVAERT

RARE

Take it from us; there are plenty of well-educated and highly experienced figures in today's videogames industry, but few can rival the portfolio of Rare's business development manager, James Veevaert. Multiple degrees in journalism, computer science and marketing communications from California State University laid the groundwork for a long and illustrious career in gaming, though games caught his eye at an early age. "My initial interest in the videogames industry started as early as the Atari 2600," he reminisces. "I was amazed at a young age that an entire day could be spent playing games."

Veevaert's career in the industry began over a decade ago when he joined the then high-flying Interplay as director of marketing. After initiating Interplay's online marketing strategy and co-forming Brainstorm (a children's software firm), it was clearly time for another change for the ambitious young man. His next major role was at Sierra, a firm famed for its adventure games, and Veevaert joined at exactly the right time. "My greatest achievement would have to be working on *Half-Life*," he tells us, although his work on the much-underrated *Descent* and the retail version of *Counter-Strike* also get honourable mentions. His time at Sierra proved most productive and during his tenure he managed to co-found Sierra Studios, take its titles to the world stage and lead teams responsible for over half a billion pounds' worth of revenue.

Having joined Microsoft Game Studios in 2001, Veevaert was in charge of business development and as such acquired some rather high-profile franchises for the Xbox. These included a familiar title for the ex-Sierra figure in the form of *Counter-Strike*, which should be inciting many a Live riot as you read this. Following the buyout of ex-Nintendo stalwarts Rare, James was assigned to managing business development and publishing for the UK-based developer. The firm's first title for the Xbox, *Grabbed By The Ghoulies*, oozes classic Rare flair and humour but what's the official company line on the colourful spook-'em-up? "We're excited to have an original game as the flagship Rare/Xbox product," Veevaert proudly proclaims, before adding "It's primarily going to attract younger gamers and it's Microsoft's opportunity to broaden the audience and installed base of the Xbox." Though perhaps somewhat undermining the widespread appeal and immaculate presentation of Rare's latest title, it's undeniable that this is an area in which Microsoft's catalogue needs some work, and in Rare it looks like it may have found the men for the job.

Veevaert is clearly a man who knows the pitfalls of the industry better than many others and he's not afraid to talk shop. "The biggest challenge in the business these days is the cost to make great games," he tells us. We're not surprised to hear this, but some figures are shocking. "It wasn't so long ago that a game could be made for $500,000 to $1 million whereas now that's hardly the budget for incremental content or an expansion pack." Budget aside, Veevaert has plenty of other concerns about the state of the industry, in particular the 'me-too' titles that crop up all too often. "Publishers and developers have to resist the temptation to create clone products," he urges, and he has a point – for every title that does its developers proud, many more fall flat. "Creating new intellectual properties and innovative content demands hiring great talent, which should be a priority for publishers and developers alike."

While this generation of consoles is far from over, the lengthy development process and lead times mean that it won't be long before many firms start work on next-next-generation software. "It's plain to see that the territory has shifted dramatically during the last couple of generations, which just goes to show how fast things can change in this business," he rightly points out, adding: "The next one should be very interesting indeed as the competitors all try to pre-empt each other." But considering his affiliation with Rare, Veevaert is surprisingly unbiased about the outcome. "Don't rule any of them out just yet…"

As always, though, Rare's staff have been well trained to withstand whatever torture we can throw at them – questions about a new Banjo adventure are given a predictably twisted answer. "As a matter of fact, you can see Banjo on the GBA," Veevaert politely explains. He knows that this isn't the response we're looking for but it does technically answer our question. Outsmarted again. Clever sod…

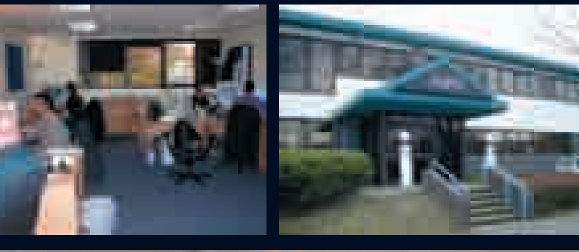
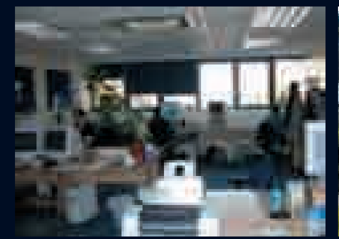


THERE'S A WORM AT THE BOTTOM OF TEAM 17'S GARDEN, BUT ITS NAME ISN'T WIGGLY-WOO… THE POPULAR BRAND MIGHT BE A WORLDWIDE SUCCESS, BUT DELVE INTO THE COMPANY'S HISTORY AND YOU'LL FIND MORE THAN JUST ANGRY ANNELIDS

TEAM 17

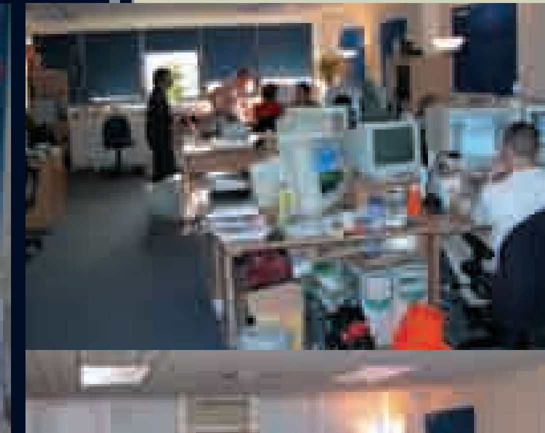
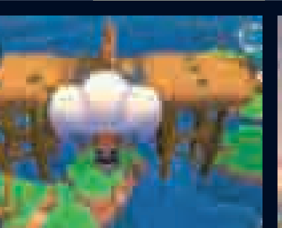
Doesn't time fly when you're having fun? It does in the games industry, especially when you consider how far we've come since the days of *Pong* and *Pac-Man* to today's world of *GTA*, *Metal Gear Solid* and, er, *Pac-Man*. Okay, so maybe things don't change that much. But look at the developers behind those games and you'll notice that there aren't many old-school names left. The firms that brought us joy on the Amiga and 486 PC have nearly all disappeared. Of course, this could be because what was once a 'bedroom programmer' activity has become a profit-driven industry. "The industry is just that now, an industry, whereas I don't think that the same sentiments could have been leveraged back then," says Martyn Brown, studio manager at Team 17, one of the few surviving UK developers from the early Nineties, "It's different in a number of fundamental areas, although pretty much all of them boil down to the amount of money and risk involved. Profits, share-listing price and margin have taken priority in the drive for quarterly results and not necessarily fantastic games. As a result of the increased corporate burden, green-lighting and panel approval systems have become commonplace as fewer individuals are trusted to rely on instincts where the mass market is concerned."

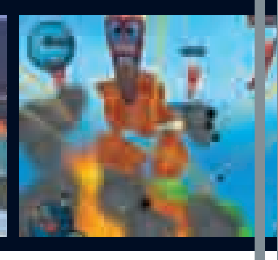
This is the hub of the Team 17 operation. Nice logo thing above the door they've got there…




This is it – the nerve-centre. Nice lampshade, by the way…

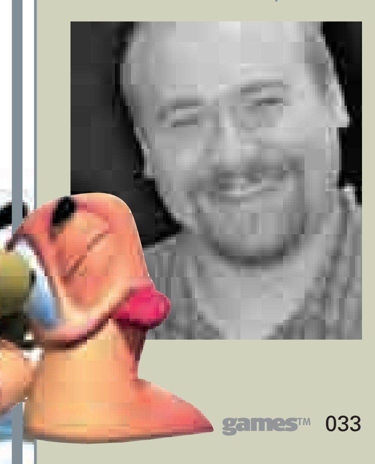
Obviously, we hate to admit such a sad fact about the industry's evolution, if it can be called that – after all, we thought evolution was supposed to enhance things rather than cripple them. But it's something that can't go unnoticed by developers, particularly those who've been around for as long as Team 17. "Few developers are able to fund the complete development of a game themselves these days," says John Dennis, Team 17's design manager. "The knock-on effect of this is that developers look to publishers to either fund all or part of the development of a game, but the consequence is that the shelves of your local games shop are filled with sequels and licensed products. I guess it's a double-edged sword, really – the gamer gets games that are of a higher visual and technical standard and I suppose branding offers some sort of promise on quality, but there's undoubtedly far less choice."

It's this lack of choice that restricts not just the games-buying public, but also the developers – costs are so high these days that very few original ideas are given the chance to flourish. Such a problem can even be seen in Team 17's line-up since the company's inception; up to 1994, the company had a wide variety of intellectual properties, yet since the discovery of the highly successful *Worms* franchise, virtually all of those have died off in favour of a slew of worm-based titles. It seems a shame that a company once rich in enjoyable games should end up relying on a single concept to stay alive, but, sadly, it's the nature of today's industry. Thankfully, the studio hasn't let the situation get them down.

"Being a long-established studio that has seen pretty much everything from retail management and production to development and publishing, we can appreciate pretty much all of the facets that the

"IT'D BE EASIER FOR US TO MAKE A GAME BASED ON PAST TITLES RATHER THAN A NEW IDEA, SIMPLY BECAUSE IT'S GOT A LOT OF HISTORY"

MARTYN BROWN, TEAM 17

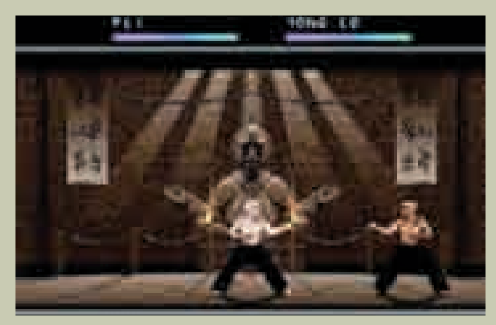


MORE THAN WORMS

Any gamer worth their salt will know that Team 17 has developed more titles than we care to mention

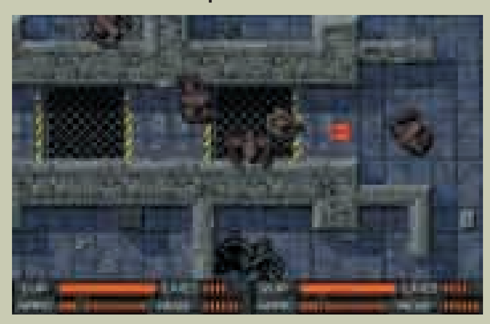
FULL CONTACT (AMIGA, 1991)

The first game released under the Team 17 banner and one that performed well for the time. An overly-dramatic storyline hid what was actually a solid 2D one-on-one beat-'em-up.



ALIEN BREED (AMIGA/PC, 1991)

One of Team 17's most appreciated and memorable titles as far as original concepts go, *Alien Breed* was scary and rather tough. Sadly, the later 3D versions didn't quite hit the mark.



PROJECT X (AMIGA/PC, 1992)

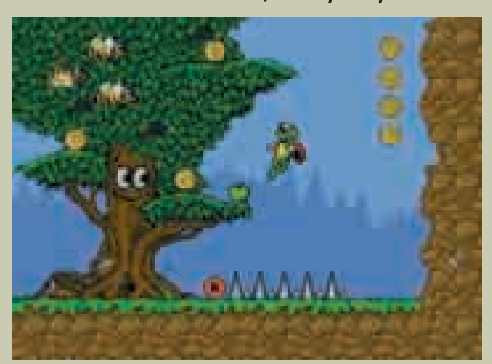
Side-scrolling shoot-'em-up fun in the vein of *R-Type*, but even harder – *Project X* is one tough cookie. Even today, we still have trouble finishing it…

BODY BLOWS (AMIGA/PC, 1993)

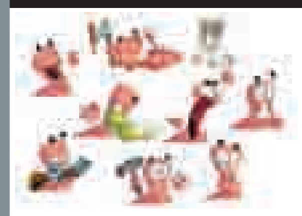
Not quite as ground-breaking as *Full Contact* (particularly in the light of *Street Fighter II*'s release), but still fairly decent for a 2D beat-'em-up, despite the slightly clunky controls.

SUPERFROG (AMIGA/PC/CD32, 1993)

While not quite in the same league as Mario or Sonic, *Superfrog*'s combination of side-scrolling platform action and guffaw-inspiring humour still makes it a memorable title, even by today's standards.



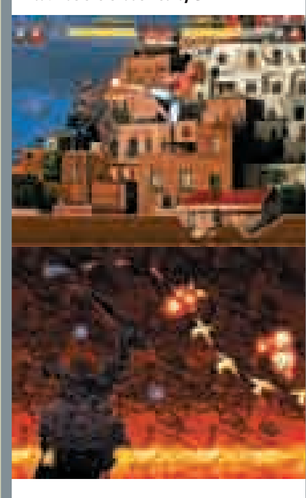
"WE'RE ALWAYS LOOKING AT OUR HERITAGE TITLES, AND ALTHOUGH THEIR FRANCHISE POWER HAS WEAKENED OVER THE YEARS, WE'VE GOT SOME PRETTY STRONG CHARACTERS AND UNIVERSES THERE FOR FUTURE EXPLORATION"



A few ideas for bringing those worms to life in glorious 3D…



Body Blows was a solid beat-'em-up, but was overshadowed by *SFII*.



ABANDONED, BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Having hit the height of its popularity (or at least, the first wave of it) back in the days of the Amiga, it's to be expected that people still want to experience Team 17 titles like *Alien Breed* and *Project X* today. Of course, the most popular way of achieving this is through emulation – a decidedly dodgy means of gaming as far as the law is concerned, no matter how old the game you're playing might be. Interestingly though, it's a concept that the higher-ups at Team 17 aren't as bothered about as you might think. "Given that the majority of our original 'classic' titles are now ten years old, I'm delighted that fans still wish to seek them out and enjoy them," admits Brown. "It's definitely a grey area legally, but in commercial terms they've seen their day I guess." Not surprisingly, suggestions that we contact the company's lawyer for further clarification followed soon afterwards…



industry can throw at you," admits Brown. "We're very fortunate that we have an evergreen title such as *Worms*, which has performed well and seen us manage the title well, growing communities and extending its appeal. It's by no means an easy marketplace these days, but we've been reasonably prudent and expanded slowly, trying to ensure our studio and people were stable during recent times."

Dennis aggrees. "Thanks to *Worms*' long and successful sales history, we're in the fortunate position of being able to develop games that players, and therefore publishers, are interested in," he says. "This, coupled with careful decisions about what games we're going to develop, and working hard to make our development process as risk-free as possible, has enabled us to keep going when many other independent UK developers have sadly fallen on hard times. Of course, the reason we've had less titles out is because it takes a bigger team and more time to make a quality game than it used to. We haven't been in trouble – we've just all been busy making *Worms 3D*."

Ah, yes – *Worms 3D*, a leap that could make or break the fanbase of the *Worms* series. While we'll freely admit that our love for the *Worms* concept was diluted by the move into 3D, it seems a lot of people have warmed to the idea. The lack of online

01

02

"MOVING WORMS INTO A THIRD DIMENSION HAS ITS OBVIOUS PROBLEMS, BUT WE'VE MADE A GAME THAT WE'RE ALL VERY HAPPY WITH"
JOHN DENNIS, TEAM 17

[FROM LEFT TO RIGHT]
John Dennis
Martyn Brown

play for the console versions remains a sticking point (although it's "something that is going to be addressed in the near future," Dennis assures us), but the fans seem happy with the game.

"The move into 3D is something that's been discussed for years," says Dennis, "and to be honest, we pretty much decided that it wasn't going to happen until the technology out there would allow us to do the game justice. It's only really been with the power that the PS2, Xbox and GameCube offer that a fully 3D deformable landscape has been possible. However, all the way through we were conscious of staying true to the original games, and trying to keep things as simple and enjoyable as possible. Moving the game into a third dimension has its obvious problems, but we feel we've addressed these problems and made a game that we're all very happy with."

Even though it's clear that the *Worms* series has been the main cash cow for Team 17, it's a shame that some of its original franchises have fallen by the wayside as a result. Certainly, 2D platformers and overhead shoot-'em-ups aren't exactly in demand on the three main consoles, but then surely that's where the appeal of handhelds comes into play. Having seen other classic titles like *Speedball 2* and *Pinball Dreams* receive updates, we sneakily wish that Team 17 would jump on the GBA bandwagon as well. "We still get many emails and letters asking for GBA versions of *Body Blows*, *Project-X*, *Superfrog* and *Alien Breed* in particular," admits Brown. "We're always looking at our heritage titles, and although their franchise power has weakened somewhat over the years we've got some pretty strong characters and universes there for future exploration. *Superfrog* keeps getting cameo roles in our games, for example, so who knows? In some respects, it'd be easier for us to get a game based on past titles rather than a totally new concept, simply because it's got a lot of history – *Alien Breed* being a tremendous example."

So, a remake of the original *Alien Breed* (a game we hold dear to our hearts and still play on a regular basis) isn't entirely out of the question then? We'll wait with bated breath to see if it ever comes to fruition, although we doubt it'll be any time soon. Which isn't to say that Team 17 isn't already hard at work on its next project. "We have a couple of things on the go at the moment," says Dennis, "but I don't think I'm allowed to tell you about them, though – well, not without killing you straight afterwards." Fair enough, though we're willing to bet at least one of those things has 'Worms' in the title…

1 NAME: JOHN DENNIS
JOB TITLE: Design Manager, Team 17
IN A NUTSHELL: Has been at Team 17 for over six years, working on every game in the *Worms* series since *Worms 2*. Used to be a teacher.

2 NAME: MARTYN BROWN
JOB TITLE: Studio Manager, Team 17
IN A NUTSHELL: One of Team 17's co-founders and part of the company for almost 14 years. Has worked on over 50 different titles throughout his career.



RELEASE LISTS


Phantasy Star Online III: C.A.R.D. Revolution GC Will it play its cards right?

Counter-Strike Xbox Is the Xbox update a patch on the original?

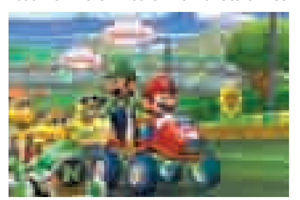
Pokémon Colosseum GC Check out all the monstrous new info on page 74.



MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo

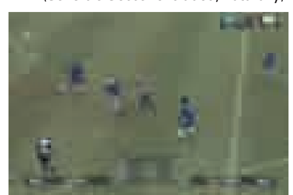
Very few games can make a busy office grind to a standstill but that's just what Mario's latest high-speed excursion has done. Falling somewhere between the 16- and 64-bit versions, there's just something about the game that keeps us coming back for more whether we want to or not.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Konami

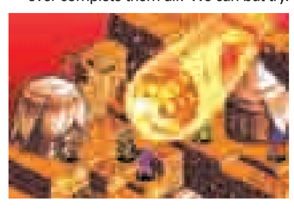
A predictable choice perhaps, but we'd be lying if we made out that any other game got more play time than Konami's footballing gem. Despite its few flaws, *PES3* still manages to claim its crown as the best footy game money can buy (*Sensible Soccer* excluded, naturally).

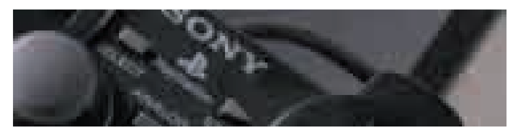


FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo

Strange as it may seem, the first *Final Fantasy* game that really benefits from 'little and often' play is one of the best things to come from Square Enix's offices in a long time. Trouble is, it doesn't seem to want to come out of our SP's… With 300 missions to work through, will you ever complete them all? We can but try.





PLAYSTATION2

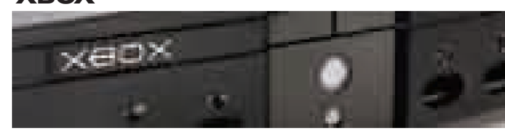
Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER			
05 December	Alias	Acclaim	
05 December	Bad Boys II	Empire Interactive	
05 December	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi Universal	
05 December	Destruction Derby Arenas	SCEE	
05 December	Flipnic	Ubisoft	
05 December	Manhunt	Take 2	
05 December	Mission Impossible 2	Atari	
05 December	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	
05 December	SWAT Global Strike Team	Vivendi	
05 December	Total Club Manager 2004	EA	
05 December	XGRA	Acclaim	
19 December	The Sims Bustin' Out	EA	
JANUARY '04			
16 January	Conan	TDK	
30 January	Arc The Lad	SCEE	
TBC	The X-Files: Resist Or Serve	Vivendi	
TBC	NFL Street	EA	
TBC	Dynasty Warriors 4 Xtreme Legends	THQ	
FEBRUARY '04			
06 February	R-Type Final	Metro 3D	
13 February	Whiplash	Eidos	
20 February	Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel	Vivendi	
27 February	Kya: Dark Lineage	Atari	
TBC	Headhunter 2: Redemption	SEGA	
TBC	Megaman X7	Capcom	
TBC	Final Fantasy X-2	SCEE	Wanted
TBC	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	Atari	
TBC	Sphinx And The Cursed Mummy	THQ	
TBC	Cy Girls	Konami	
TBC	Breath Of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	
TBC	Starcraft: Ghost	Vivendi	
TBC	Richard Burns Rally	Universal	
MARCH '04			
26 March	Iron Storm	Wanadoo	
TBC	Gran Turismo 4	SCEE	Wanted
TBC	Driver 3	Atari	
TBC	This Is Football 2004	SCEE	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Tak And The Power Of Juju	THQ	
TBC	The Getaway 2	SCEE	
TBC	DJ	Sony	
TBC	R: Racing Evolution	Namco	
TBC	Megaman Anniversary Collection	Capcom	
TBC	Gradius V	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Sniper Elite	Wanadoo	
TBC	Karaoke Stage	Konami	
TBC	Sing Star	SCEE	
TBC	Eyetoy: Sports	SCEE	

GAMECUBE



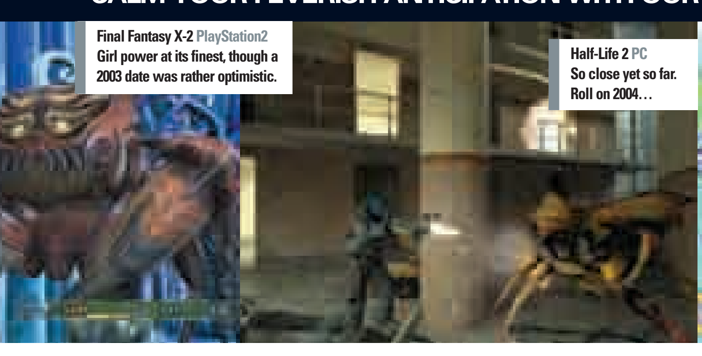
Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER			
05 December	Batman: Rise Of Sin Tzu	Ubisoft	
05 December	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi	
05 December	Mario Party 5	Nintendo	
05 December	Mission Impossible: Operation Surma	Atari	
05 December	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	
05 December	XGRA	Acclaim	
05 December	XIII	Ubisoft	
12 December	The Sims Bustin' Out	EA	
TBC	Sphinx And The Cursed Mummy	THQ	
TBC	Billy Hatcher And The Giant Egg	SEGA	
FEBRUARY '04			
06 February	Conan	TDK	
TBC	Phantasy Star Online Episode III: C.A.R.D. Revolution	SEGA	
TBC	Sphinx And The Cursed Mummy	THQ	
MARCH '04			
TBC	007 James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	EA	
TBC	Tak And The Power Of Juju	THQ	
TBC	Kirby's Air Ride	Nintendo	
TBC	R: Racing Evolution	Namco	
TBC	Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles	Nintendo	
TBC	Wario Ware	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Box	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Channel	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Colosseum	Nintendo	
TBC	Pikmin 2	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes	Konami	
TBC	Nintendo Puzzle Collection	Nintendo	
TBC	Harvest Moon: It's A Wonderful Life	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	

XBOX



Month	Title	Publisher
DECEMBER		
05 December	Bad Boys II	Empire Interactive
05 December	Rogue Ops	Capcom

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



Final Fantasy X-2 PlayStation2
Girl power at its finest, though a 2003 date was rather optimistic.

Half-Life 2 PC
So close yet so far. Roll on 2004…



Mario And Luigi GBA
Action RPG shenanigans with the dynamic duo



Project Gotham Racing 2 Xbox Killer app or last place? Race over to page 92…

05 December	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	
05 December	Counter-Strike	Microsoft	
12 December	Unreal II: The Awakening	Atari	
12 December	Links 2004	Microsoft	
12 December	The Sims Bustin' Out	EA	
TBC	Alias	Acclaim	
TBC	Amped 2	Microsoft	
TBC	Armed & Dangerous	Activision	
TBC	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami	
TBC	Dancing Stage Unleashed	Konami	
JANUARY '04			
TBC	Conan	TDK	
FEBRUARY '04			
13 February	Whiplash	Eidos	
20 February	Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel	Vivendi	
TBC	Headhunter 2: Redemption	SEGA	
MARCH '04			
05 March	BC	Microsoft	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Driver 3	Atari	
TBC	Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Halo 2	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Armed & Dangerous	Activision	
TBC	Dead Man's Hand	Atari	
TBC	Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	
TBC	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	
TBC	Fable	Microsoft	
TBC	Team SAS	Vivendi	
TBC	True Fantasy Live Online	Microsoft	
TBC	Kameo: Elements Of Power	Microsoft	
TBC	Sudeki	Microsoft	
TBC	Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	Dead Or Alive Online	Microsoft	

PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER			
05 December	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	
05 December	Lock-On: Modern Air Combat	Ubisoft	
12 December	Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	
TBC	Ultima X: Odyssey	EA	
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	
TBC	Armed & Dangerous	Activision	
JANUARY '04			
TBC	EverQuest II	Ubisoft	
FEBRUARY '04			
06 February	X²: The Threat	Koch	
20 February	Neighbours From Hell 2	Bigben	
27 February	Horizons: Empire Of Istaria	Atari	
TBC	Alias	Acclaim	
TBC	The Sims 2	EA	
TBC	Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	
TBC	Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Wanted
TBC	Vampire The Masquerade: Bloodlines	Activision	
TBC	Doom III	Activision	
TBC	Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault	EA	
TBC	Warhammer Online	SEGA	
TBC	Fire Warrior	THQ	
TBC	Evil Genius	Vivendi	
TBC	Thief 3	Eidos	
TBC	Richard Burns Rally	SCI	
TBC	Sam And Max: Freelance Police	Activision	
TBC	Black And White 2	Microsoft	
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Oblivion Lost	THQ	
TBC	Sniper Elite	Wanadoo	Wanted
TBC	Driver 3	Atari	

GBA



Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER			
05 December	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi	
05 December	James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	EA	
05 December	Mission Impossible: Operation Surma	Atari	
12 December	Medal Of Honor: Infiltrator	EA	Wanted
19 December	Need For Speed Underground	EA	
19 December	The Sims Bustin' Out	EA	
FEBRUARY '04			
TBC	Sphinx And The Cursed Mummy	THQ	
TBC	Fire Emblem	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Leaf Green/Fire Red	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	
TBC	Sword Of Mana	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Sonic Battle	SEGA	
TBC	Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Nintendo	Wanted

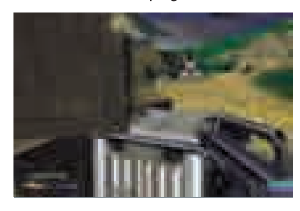
PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. It's not our fault, really it isn't. We tried ever so hard and may well cry if you get cross with us.

gamesTM ON THE HORIZON

FAR CRY

Format: PC
Publisher: Ubisoft

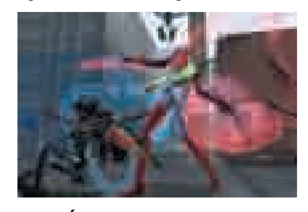
Ubisoft's hot streak shows no signs of cooling down, as even well into next year titles like the stunning *Far Cry* will be flying the Tricolore for all the industry to see. The FPS genre is a horribly crowded one and it takes a real classic to get the world to take notice – could this be the next *Halo*? Here's hoping…



KUNOICHI

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SEGA

It may not have been a fully faithful *Shinobi* update, but SEGA's PS2 remake of the seminal ninja title was decent enough – it must have been fairly popular to warrant a sequel like this. With a female lead and host of new challenges, we're looking forward to seeing if SEGA can put right the flaws of the original.



POKÉMON LEAF GREEN/FIRE RED

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo

Part of us is excited because we'll see the original Poké-adventures in glorious technicolour, part of us thrilled that many old monsters will be available once more, and part of us remembers that Pokémon games are some of the best portable RPGs money can buy. Sadly, the 'new game/cash in' line gets finer by the day…





THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

FROM THE FRONT

THE GLOVES COME OFF FOR CHRISTMAS AND THE N-GAGE CONTINUES TO DISAPPOINT…

DON'T SHOOT THE MESSENGER…



Publicising videogames is a fine job – one of the best – and I often thank my lucky stars for the opportunities it has presented. To have worked with some stunningly creative minds both vicariously and at close quarters has been a privilege and, frankly, a pleasure. But I'm not here to gloat.

I've also worked on some absolute dogs, games that do nothing but leave me asking myself, 'Why?'. I won't name examples, but, ultimately, I've got just cause to complain because I, and others like me, have to clean up the mess.

All too often it's easy to blame the PR and marketing departments when a high-concept game underperforms. The positioning, the creative, the review scores and all that. I know it's easy because I've done it myself with rival games, movies, records and football.

Now and again, though, it's only right to direct some of the blame at the guy whose job it is to create the year's production slate, sign the deals and commission the development of particularly bad games.

In Hollywood, the head of production is given complete control over the studio's output. A slate of ten to 15 movies is green lighted for the year, he or she is judged on their performance and, come the end of the year, will stand or fall depending on the slate's degree of success.

Obviously, the publicity departments are given the occasional rocket when a film tanks, which is fair when justified. More often than not, though, blame filters back to the project commissioner which is even fairer.

No bitterness here, but now and again it would be nice to see blame culture shared around a bit in the videogames industry. Not all development personnel are the geniuses they are made out to be…

Stuart Ledger
PR Director, MK Communications

MM3 – Xbox saviour?

MICROSOFT, NINTENDO AND SONY CONTINUE TO CHURN OUT THE SALES FIGURES

LET THE BATTLE COMMENCE

Now that Christmas is just around the corner, the gloves are off and all three major players are doing whatever it takes to ensure that little Jimmy's new console becomes another point on their sales chart. Of course, one of the easiest ways to do this is to make your machine as appealing as possible and reinforce how well it's doing throughout the world.

After an embarrassing 2002, the forecast for Nintendo (for the next six months, at least) has picked up remarkably. Since the GameCube's price drop, initial figures have been very good indeed. Over in America, the console is now a good $80 (£50) cheaper than its nearest competitor and has quadrupled its sales. "In a tough economy, we've found the sweet spot in pricing," explained NOA's George Harrison to a recent investor conference. "Players are now grabbing Nintendo GameCube systems off the shelves at the fastest rate since the console's debut." Despite these impressive figures, and the fact that Nintendo has restarted production of the GameCube, Microsoft's Xbox continues to outsell the machine in the US, albeit by a very small margin. In the UK, however, things are slightly different…

GameCube sales have already reached a plateau in the UK and the most recent hardware report (from 4 November)



IBM CHIPS IN

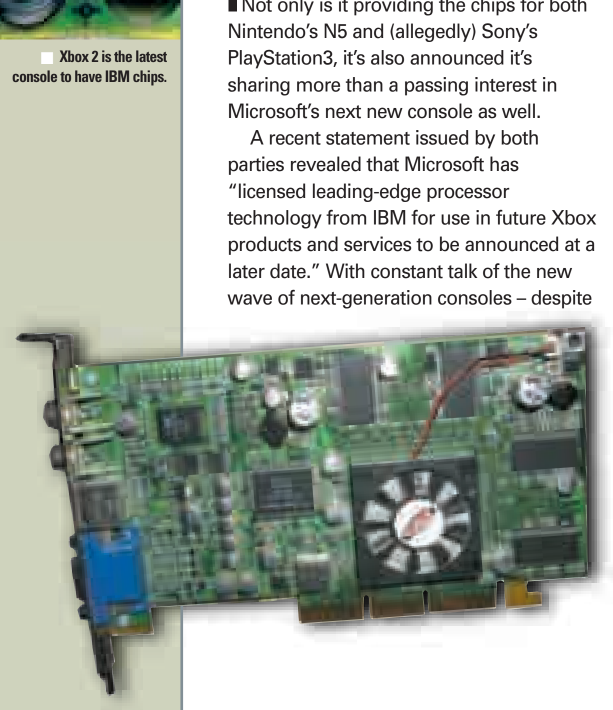
MICROSOFT'S XBOX 2 HAS FOUND A NEW PROCESSOR CHIP

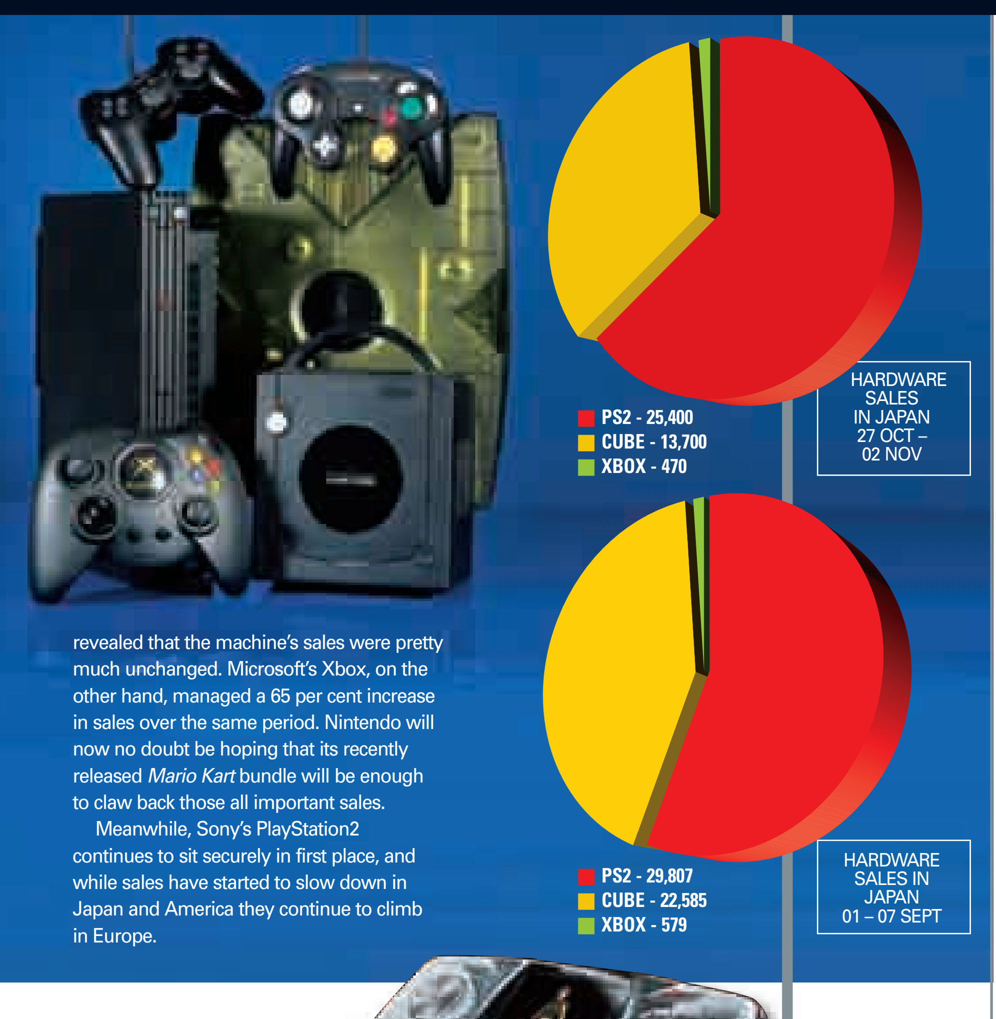
IBM is certainly very busy at the moment. Not only is it providing the chips for both Nintendo's N5 and (allegedly) Sony's PlayStation3, it's also announced it's sharing more than a passing interest in Microsoft's next new console as well.

A recent statement issued by both parties revealed that Microsoft has "licensed leading-edge processor technology from IBM for use in future Xbox products and services to be announced at a later date." With constant talk of the new wave of next-generation consoles – despite the infancy of both Nintendo's and Microsoft's current machines – it's quite likely that this deal will include Microsoft's Xbox 2. ATI will already be supplying the new graphics technology for Microsoft's next console and both Nintendo and Microsoft share many similarities (Nintendo currently uses both IBM and ATI technology in its GameCube).

While the Xbox was based on x86 PC technology, it's quite possible that Microsoft will take a completely different route with its next machine. As a result we could expect to see the Xbox 2 finally escaping from the 'PC in a box' tag that has followed the first machine throughout its existence. With two machines now currently favouring the same core technology, we can't help but wonder if the world will eventually see the appearance of a single machine that could perhaps dominate the market…

Xbox 2 is the latest console to have IBM chips.





revealed that the machine's sales were pretty much unchanged. Microsoft's Xbox, on the other hand, managed a 65 per cent increase in sales over the same period. Nintendo will now no doubt be hoping that its recently released *Mario Kart* bundle will be enough to claw back those all important sales.

Meanwhile, Sony's PlayStation2 continues to sit securely in first place, and while sales have started to slow down in Japan and America they continue to climb in Europe.

HOW WELL IS THE N-GAGE ACTUALLY PERFORMING?

LITTLE WHITE LIES

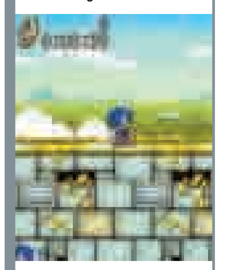
Nokia's N-Gage has been on sale for over a month now, but we're still no closer to finding out how well the system is actually faring. Although Nokia has consistently boasted about the fact it's shipped 400,000 units, actual sales for the machine are exceptionally well-guarded. Whilst many analysts feel that the actual first week sales were around the 500 mark (at least in retail game stores), Nokia is not admitting anything other than what it has shipped out.

Even Game, the UK's biggest games retailer, is reluctant to talk about the N-Gage's recent performance and would give us little more than a "no comment" when we asked about the machine's first month. Add to this the fact that several American chains (including the likes of Electronics Boutique and GameStop) have already knocked $100 off the price within two weeks of the machine's release and it's clear that Nokia has its work cut out.

Nada Usina, Nokia's general manager in North and South America has admitted that the company has "a lot to do to make sure our expectations are in alignment". When you consider that Nokia is still predicting sales of six million by the end of 2004, you have to wonder exactly what the company has got planned…



So how many units has the N-Gage sold? Er…

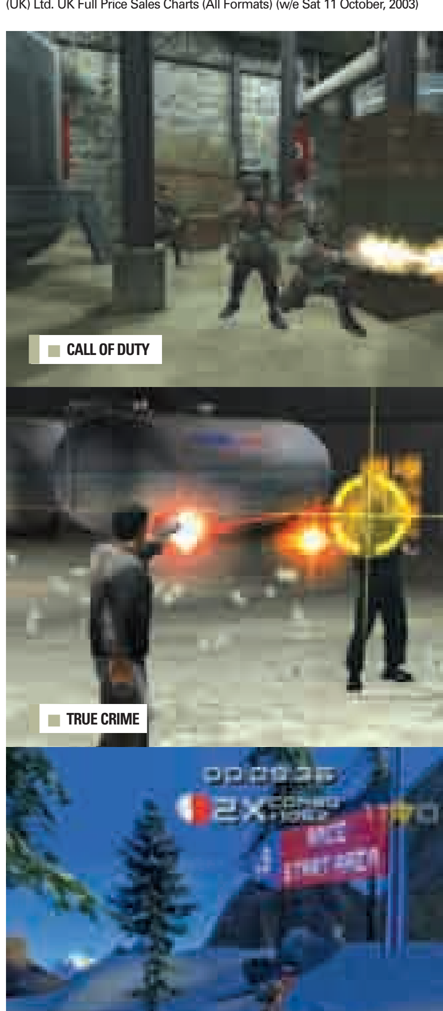


UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	FIFA 2004	EA Sports	Multi
2	WWE Smackdown!	THQ	PS2
3	True Crime: Streets Of LA	Activision	Multi
4	The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi	Multi
5	SSX 3	EA Big	Multi
6	Finding Nemo	THQ	Multi
7	Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	PS2
8	The Sims: Makin' Magic	EA Games	PC
9	Call Of Duty	Activision	PC
10	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	EA Sports	Multi

We can't say we're too surprised to see Electronic Arts' latest *FIFA* title at the top of the charts, though the drop for Konami's football title is a little disappointing. EA continue to dominate the top ten, and with Christmas jnearly upon us, this is unlikely to change in the near future.

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of ELSPA (UK) Ltd. UK Full Price Sales Charts (All Formats) (w/e Sat 11 October, 2003)



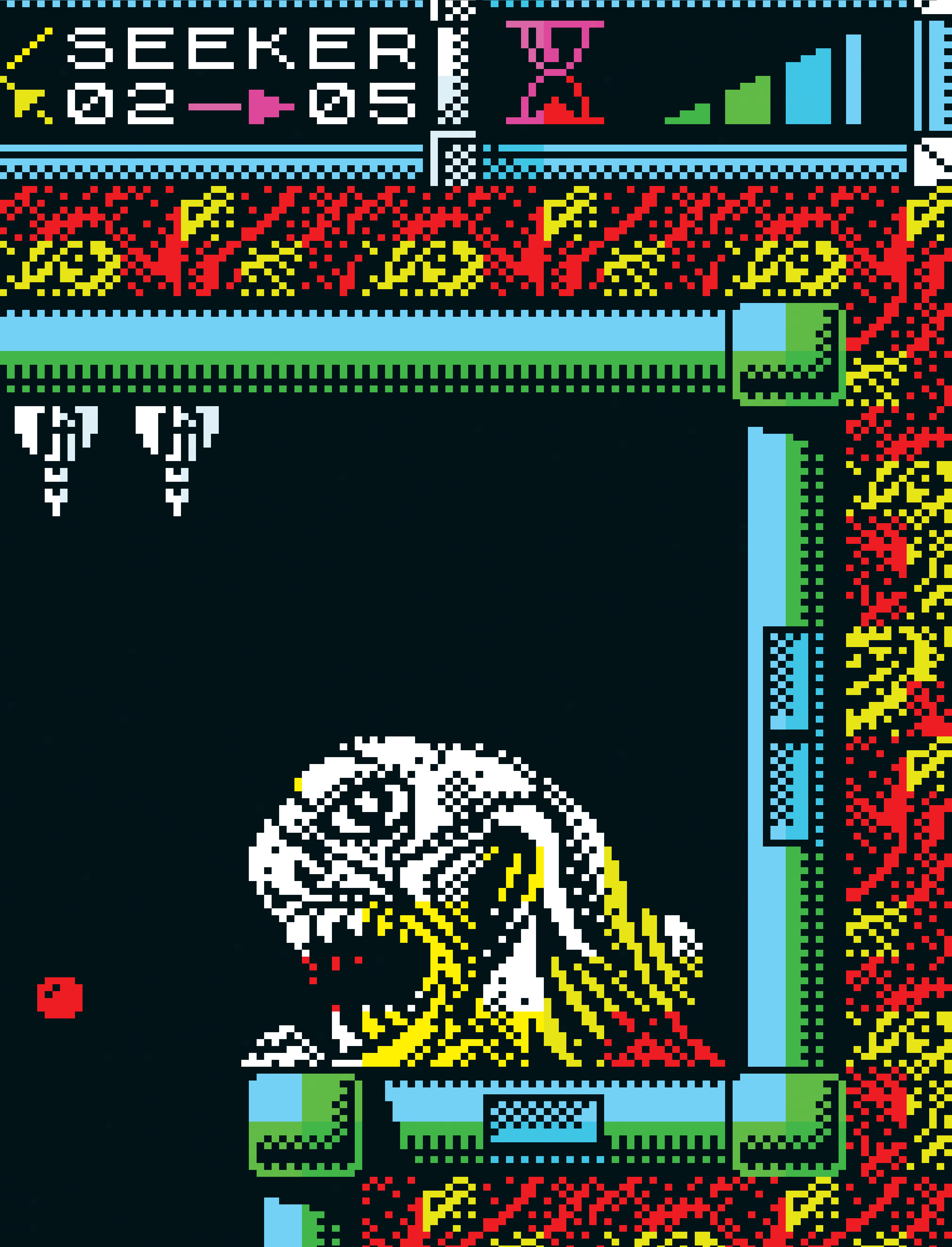
CALL OF DUTY

TRUE CRIME

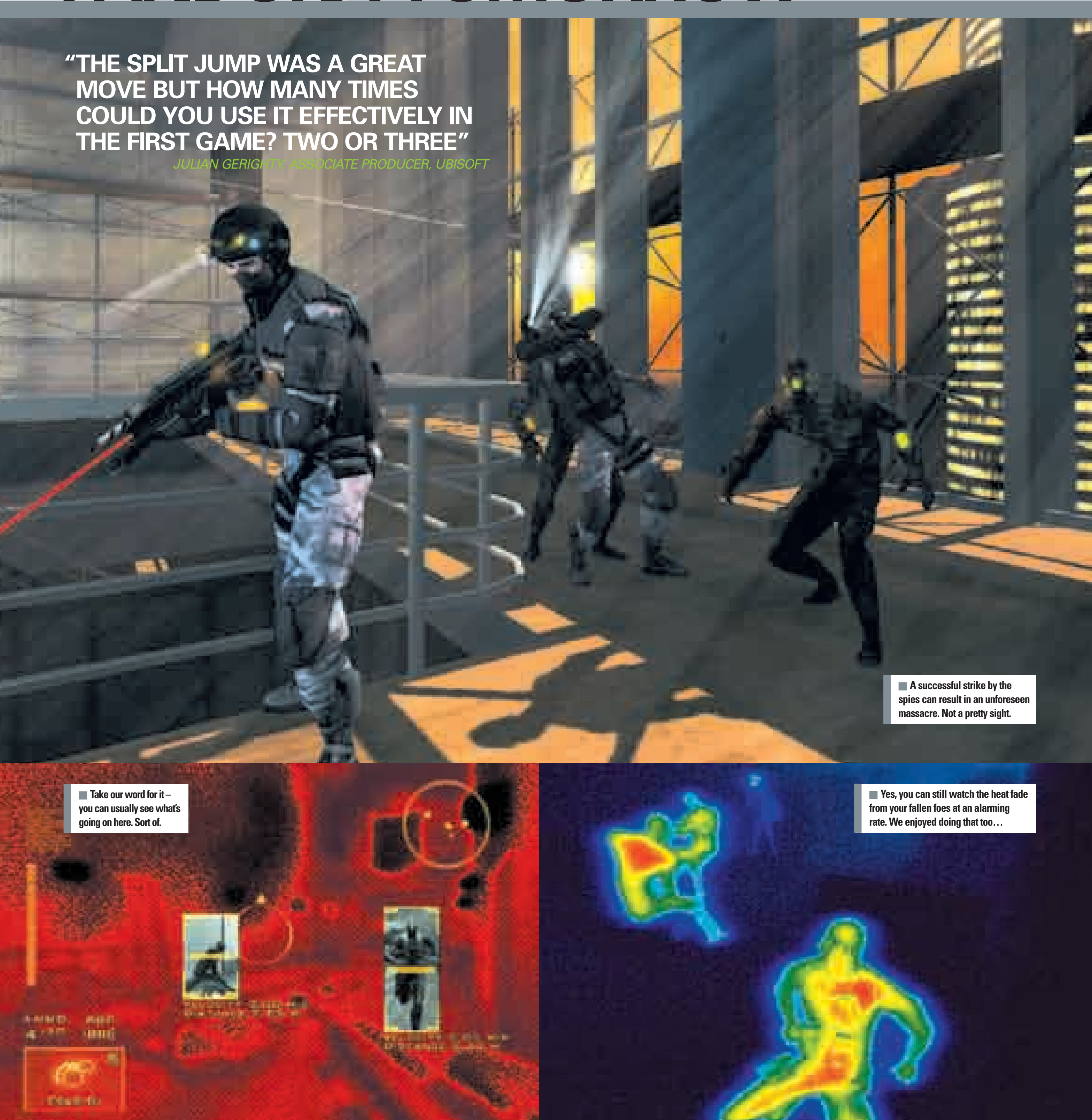
SSX 3

Wait 'til you see the whites of its eyes… **Cybernoid II: The Revenge Various Home Systems [Hewson] 1989**




SEEKER
02 → 05

SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW



"THE SPLIT JUMP WAS A GREAT MOVE BUT HOW MANY TIMES COULD YOU USE IT EFFECTIVELY IN THE FIRST GAME? TWO OR THREE"

JULIAN GERIGHTY, ASSOCIATE PRODUCER, UBISOFT

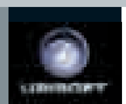
A successful strike by the spies can result in an unforeseen massacre. Not a pretty sight.

Take our word for it – you can usually see what's going on here. Sort of.

Yes, you can still watch the heat fade from your fallen foes at an alarming rate. We enjoyed doing that too…

SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

XBOX/MULTIFORMAT



COMPANY PROFILE

It doesn't take a genius to see that Ubisoft's form of late has been absolutely top notch, and not content with just having a fantastic year and a promising holiday period, the rising quality of its products looks certain to continue well into next year.

HISTORY

- **BEYOND GOOD & EVIL** 2003 [PlayStation2]
- **RAYMAN 2: THE GREAT ESCAPE** 2000 [Dreamcast]
- **STREET RACER** 1995 [Mega Drive]

NOW YOU SEE HIM, NOW YOU DON'T…

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, GameCube, PC
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: March '04
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1 (1-4 Online)

Sam Fisher returns to do more of what he does best – skulk around in shadows and make wisecracks in the face of death. What a guy.

Coming out of nowhere and impressing most gamers with its technical and conceptual achievements, the original *Splinter Cell* has proved to be a defining moment in recent gaming history. With gameplay and style to die for, it remains a must-have title, but even its creators were taken aback by the game's success. "We knew we had something special, but the level of critical and commercial success that it achieved took us by surprise," says *Splinter Cell*'s associate producer Julian Gerighty.

A year later and with five versions of the game available, the time has come for Fisher to go back to work in another bunch of hostile situations. Expect to see the usual industrial environments interspersed with moving trains and expansive outdoor sections to name but a few. Promising a fairer, less linear and substantially more impressive experience, *SC2*'s March release date can't come soon enough.

While we'll admit that the first game did suffer from sections that quickly slipped into sheer frustration, the developers have picked up on this and made changes accordingly. Difficulty will apparently remain roughly the same (save for the frustration, of course) as will the length of the adventure, but if everything goes to plan we're expecting a far more engrossing and compelling experience this time, even if it is all very down to earth. "We had a great story that was grounded in realism – we're not about going off to find giant robots," quips Gerighty, but we're sure we have no idea what he means…

Sam himself has obviously been in training since the last game. As well as new, more practical moves – the split jump was very under-used previously, as Ubisoft is fully aware – Fisher is being developed as a character with whom the player can identify. "Ubisoft has let me push his idiosyncrasies a little bit further," explains JT Petty, the game's scriptwriter. "We'll see more of his sense of humour, cynicism and what makes Fisher stand out against other similar characters." Petty knows the Clancy universe inside out, and he explains exactly what makes a Clancy game. "There's a two-part thrill to all Tom Clancy's stuff – you can pretend you're Sam Fisher, you spy on people and shoot foreigners, but also what happens in the game could really happen – you could see it on CNN and believe it."

With a story so clearly modelled on real life ("day-after-tomorrow reality" as Petty calls it), it'll come as little surprise that there's been plenty of research into locations, organisations and equipment. Complaints about the inaccuracy of the weapons in the last game have been addressed in a rather ingenious manner – Ubisoft wanted to retain some degree of inaccuracy but should you want pixel-perfect shooting you can now use a laser sight. The downside of this is that its red dot can be seen by enemies, but it will avoid the *Splinter Cell* silliness of having to waste several bullets to shoot out a light at close range. Highly trained agent indeed…

And the news gets better. They said it couldn't be done, but after a lot of late nights and thinking caps, *Splinter Cell* now has a multiplayer mode. Gerighty sums up the main problem with creating a multiplayer version of the game: "How could we make a multiplayer stealth action experience in a series that proudly puts

"AFTER A LOT OF LATE NIGHTS AND THINKING CAPS SPLINTER CELL HAS BEEN GIVEN A MULTIPLAYER MODE"



Teamwork is the order of the day in the multiplayer modes – work together or die alone. Cruel, huh?

TOYZ 'N THE HOOD

Fans of Sam Fisher's gadgets like the Sticky Cam and the Optic Camera will be delighted to hear that these devices will return alongside a host of new bits and pieces. Augmentations to the existing kit include the addition of Sam's vision modes to his cameras and increased potential of most of his other technology. In addition, many multiplayer devices are either upgraded versions of familiar tools or brand new inclusions. Naturally, Ubisoft is keen to keep much of the new gadgetry under wraps until you find it for yourself, and this element of surprise is something we wouldn't dream of spoiling. Well, not quite yet, anyway.

SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW CONT.

forward Sam Fisher as a lone operative?" There's a simple answer – don't play as Fisher. The spies in the multiplayer game are faceless members of an organisation known as Shadownet, and despite many similarities to the single-player star, these guys make Sam look positively lazy. Highly agile and trained in the use of non-lethal force, expect to see these athletic agents using their vertical supremacy (jumping, climbing, hanging and the like) to take enemy mercenaries by surprise before unleashing a range of gadgets like Sam's.

The mercenaries are the human-controlled opponents of the familiar spies and everything about them is new to the series. "In order to develop a well-balanced game system, what we did was work on opposite strengths and weaknesses," explains creative director Gunther Galipot, and the two forces couldn't be much more different. Taking cues from *Rainbow Six* and *Ghost Recon*, the mercs play from a first-person viewpoint – giving them the same flexible viewpoint was seen as an unfair advantage, especially given their heavy-duty firepower. Despite lacking the night- and thermal-vision options of the spies, the hired guns can use electromagnetic sensors (which display any kind of current, such as those created by the spies' gadgets) and motion-based infra-red vision. So it's a level playing field.

Even with a good deal of innovation already shown, *Pandora Tomorrow*'s multiplayer shenanigans continue to impress with their freshness and ingenuity. From major gameplay elements (spies taking the mercenaries hostage to use retinal scanners or get information, for instance) to subtle nuances like the visual effects caused by various situations, nothing seems to have been forgotten in creating the tense and enjoyable missions. These include screen burn from flashbang grenades, double vision from a physical blow and all manner of steam and condensation effects from pipes, water and broken fire extinguishers.

There are also more specific subtleties, such as the HUD of a mercenary being thrown into disarray by a tazer shot, and it's these tiny differences that ultimately make the play experience on both sides so very different. The maximum of four players has been decided upon not for technical reasons but to maintain the pace and suspense of the single-player game, as Galipot is eager to explain. "When we came up with the concept, we realised that a game which is all about tension prevents too many players from being in the same place at the same time," he says.

We've only been treated to a couple of the single-player missions and a glimpse of the huge multiplayer potential, but even from these it's plain to see that *Pandora Tomorrow* is the product of its predecessor's mistakes. It's great to see developers listening to criticism and, better still, acting upon it – something that has clearly happened during *Splinter Cell 2*'s development process. Gerighty is keen to back this up. "Self-improvement being a major hobby of ours, we kept our eyes on the reviews and forums to see what gamers liked and liked less about *Splinter Cell*," he says with a smile.

And why shouldn't he be happy? Ubisoft has had a great year, *Splinter Cell* has earned high praise, and its sequel looks set to revolutionise the genre. That must be a reason to be cheerful.

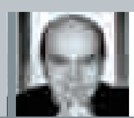
"IT'S GREAT TO SEE DEVELOPERS LISTENING TO CRITICISM AND ACTING UPON IT"

SPEAK TO ME, SOMEONE

***Pandora Tomorrow*'s brilliant use of the headset is thus far unrivalled in console gaming – as well as the obvious team orders and chat, Ubisoft has tried to implement its more practical uses. Conversations between opponents can be jammed or intercepted using the relevant equipment, but it's the hostage situations where this ingenuity really comes across. After grabbing an enemy from behind, you'll establish a one-to-one voice link with the captive opponent allowing you to garner useful information, inform him of your evil (or not so evil) schemes or just tell him that you're about to break his neck like a twig. Friendly? No. Wonderfully inventive? Oh yes…**



Traps and wildlife litter the plains, and you don't want to be messing with either.



TALENT PROFILE

Born in 1950 in Toronto, Michael Ironside (the voice of Sam Fisher) has enjoyed a lucrative career in the arts – how many people can boast TV roles and big-screen appearances alongside both Arnie and Mr T? Even in gaming, it would appear, Ironside is a most desirable asset…

HISTORY

- **THE PERFECT STORM** 2000 (Movie)
- **STARSHIP TROOPERS** 1997 (Movie)
- **V** 1984 (TV)

The classic 'you distract him, I'll shoot his head off from above' tactic in all its glory.

Going outdoors means that Sam has to get togged up in a brand new outfit – green is the new black.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE MOLECULAR MAKE-UP OF A SECRET AGENT

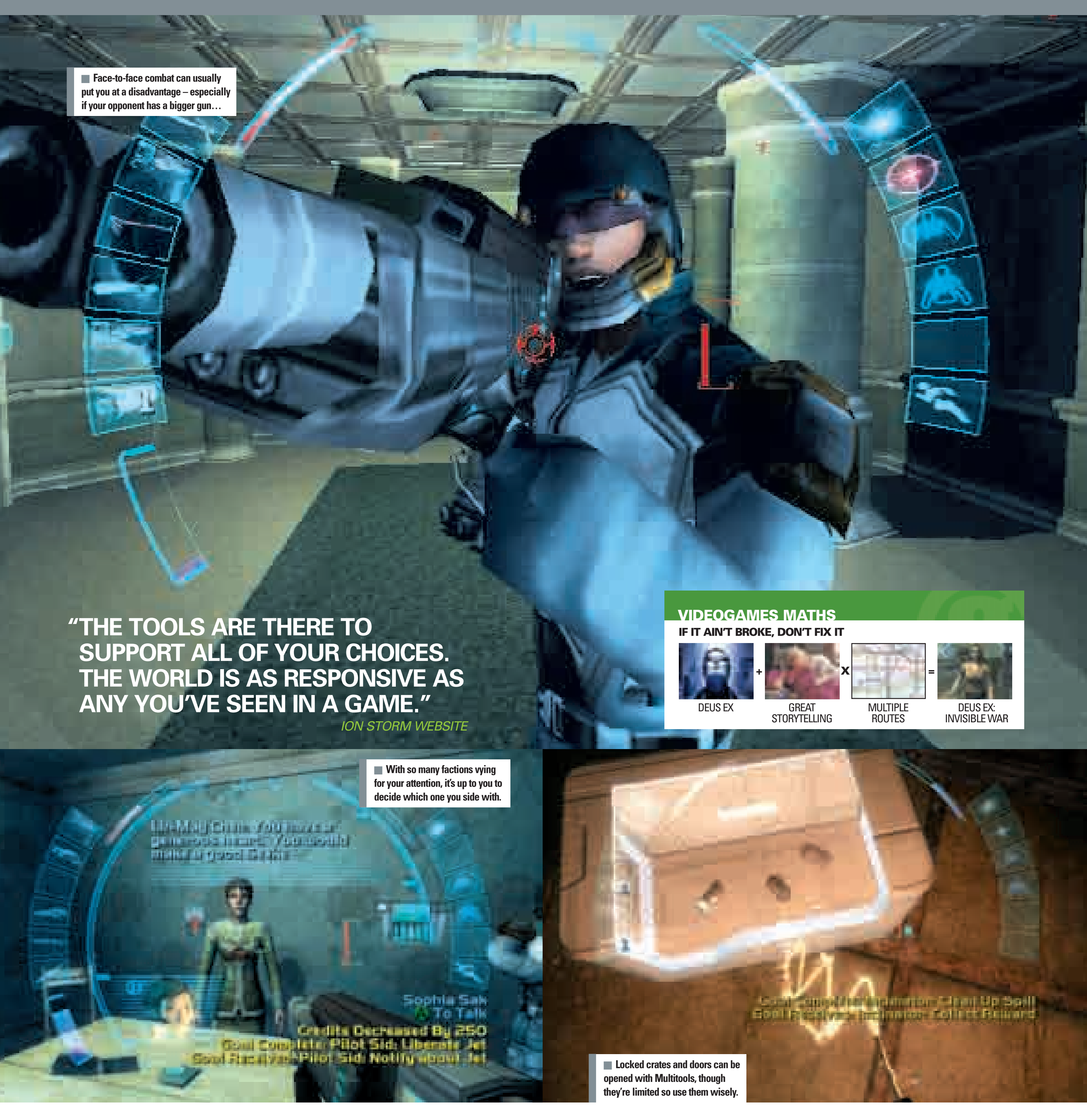
SPLINTER CELL + RAINBOW SIX 3 + COUNTER-STRIKE = SC: PANDORA TOMORROW

"IF YOU PROVIDE THE SAME TOOLS FOR BOTH TEAMS, IT BECOMES A SHOOTER – WHAT IS THE POINT OF HIDING IN THE SHADOWS WHEN BOTH TEAMS HAVE NIGHT VISION?"

GUNTHER GALIPOT, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, UBISOFT

Shoot out the lights and stage your very own 'murder in the dark' tournament. Ah, go on…

DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR



■ Face-to-face combat can usually put you at a disadvantage – especially if your opponent has a bigger gun…

"THE TOOLS ARE THERE TO SUPPORT ALL OF YOUR CHOICES. THE WORLD IS AS RESPONSIVE AS ANY YOU'VE SEEN IN A GAME."
ION STORM WEBSITE

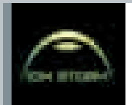
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT

DEUS EX + GREAT STORYTELLING x MULTIPLE ROUTES = DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

■ With so many factions vying for your attention, it's up to you to decide which one you side with.

■ Locked crates and doors can be opened with Multitools, though they're limited so use them wisely.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Based in Austin, Texas, Ion Storm was formed by a group of ex-id Software employees and has had illustrious industry talents such as John Romero and Warren Spector working under its banner. Incidentally, it was Spector who headed up the team responsible for *Deus Ex* and its upcoming sequel.

HISTORY

■ **ANACHRONOX** 2001 (PC)
■ **DEUS EX** 2000 (PC)
■ **DAIKATANA** 2000 (PC)

IS EIDOS PLAYING IT SAFE WITH THE POPULAR PC FRANCHISE?

Although we take a dim view of publishers who reprise the same ideas over and over, you have to admit that from a business perspective, it makes perfect sense. Take the hugely successful *Deus Ex*, for example: when a game picks up over 30 Game Of The Year awards and gets praised the world over, you're hardly going to go back to the drawing board for the sequel. And so it is that we have *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, an inevitable follow-up that sticks to the original's principles and enhances them, rather than doing anything new. Tsk. And the worst thing? All this appears to have only made it even better…

If you're lucky enough to have played *Deus Ex* through to its conclusion, the first question you've probably got is where on earth the sequel picks up from; with multiple endings available depending on how you played, it'd be hard for *Invisible War* to follow on from where the original left off. Thankfully, Ion Storm has managed to side-step that little problem by heading further into the future – 20 years, to be exact – where the world is a different place and you're a different character.

Assuming the role of covert anti-terrorist operative Alex D (a suitably genderless name, seeing as you can be male or female), you're chucked in at the deep end as far as plot goes. With the world in the grip of a crippling depression and corporate-run governments using terrorism as a weapon against one another, it goes without saying that you're the only person who can get to the bottom of the conspiracy behind this state of affairs and ultimately save the day.

Much like (or rather, exactly like) the original *Deus Ex*, though, it's how you go about trying to do this that's the crux of the whole game; the amount of freedom you have over where you go and what you do really is impressive, particularly when compared to other games that claim to offer the player complete autonomy over their actions. As before, this freedom presents itself in many forms, such as how you go about getting past basic situations like overcoming an obstacle or exploring an area, to huge plot-altering branches that allow you to decide where your loyalties lie.

With so many factions vying for your attention and trust (from government-trained covert groups and fanatical religious sects to warring factions of cyborgs and humans alike), there's plenty of scope for changing the way the story develops simply by choosing to side with a particular group and complete various missions, although, naturally, whether you then decide to remain loyal in the long run is entirely up to you.

It's very easy for us to talk about the choice and flexibility in *Invisible War*, but it's not until you actually sit down and get to grips with its innovating mix of FPS, action and RPG elements that you really appreciate just how much there is on offer. Very few games (if any) grant the player multiple routes through even the simplest of tasks, the ability to do your own thing in terms of exploration *and* a storyline that melds itself to your playing experience; we can't help but be interested in how far *Invisible War* is expanding upon the original game's concepts.

Rushed out for a US release before Christmas, Eidos is promising that the PAL version will be even more polished when it comes out next year. Here's hoping that's not just an idle boast…

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox/PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Ion Storm
RELEASE: Q1 '04 (US: Out Now)
GENRE: Adventure/FPS
PLAYERS: 1

■ The follow-up to Eidos' hugely popular *Deus Ex* builds on all the elements that made the first game great, and adds a whole lot more.

MOD YOUR BODY

Just as *Deus Ex* used nanobot augmentations to improve your abilities, *Invisible War* has Biomod technology for the same purpose. The various Biomod canisters that can be bought, found or even stolen allow you to modify Alex D's skills, depending on which of the five mod slots you use them on – Leg Biomods, for instance, improve running and jumping, while Skin Biomods allow you to cloak yourself. It's the choice of Biomods you use that shapes your *Deus Ex* experience, as the skills you have dictate how you deal with each situation, especially since a Biomod can't be removed. There are even black-market Biomods, though they could be bad for your health…

"DESPITE HAVING MANY OF THE SAME ELEMENTS AS THE LAST GAME, THIS FEELS DIFFERENT IN MANY WAYS"



■ Choose to go against The Order (a nutty religious sect) and you'll have Seekers following you around…

■ Although dealing with thugs isn't nice, it'll often be the only way to get hold of decent information.

JADE EMPIRE

BIOWARE PREPARES TO BRING EPIC ADVENTURING BACK DOWN TO EARTH

DETAILS
FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: BioWare
RELEASE: Q4 '04
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

Tool yourself up with a stunning repertoire of martial arts, mystical powers and weaponry, and embark on a perilous adventure.

Canadian developer BioWare has carved out quite a reputation as one of the world's leading RPG specialists, so following the meteoric success of *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* earlier this year, the mere mention of yet another epic adventure has us licking our lips in anticipation. Once again due for an exclusive Xbox release as part of BioWare's multi-game deal with Microsoft, *Jade Empire* looks set to build on the stunning calibre of the studio's existing portfolio with an ambitious concept that has apparently been on the drawing board for the best part of a decade. Now, thanks to the solid gameplay foundations laid in *KOTOR*, studio heads Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk have finally decided the time is right for the team to begin sculpting their grand designs into a reality.

The game's basic premise is that of a martial arts-based RPG staged within a fantastical universe inspired by ancient Chinese mythology. Freed from the constraints of the *Star Wars* legacy, the team have clearly relished the opportunity to let their imaginations run wild in creating a rich new gaming world and bringing it to life with a unique population of characters.

Players will take the role of a promising young student learning the ways of their chosen fighting art at a school in some remote corner of the empire. When the everyday tranquillity is threatened by reported sightings of demonic spirits attacking nearby villages, our hero must embark on an epic journey that will span the furthest reaches of the land and darkest depths of the spirit plane as a sinister plot is unravelled.

Perhaps *Jade Empire*'s most intriguing feature will be the incredible scope of the combat that looks set to form a substantial portion of the game. Before the adventure begins players will be given the option of either selecting from a line-up of generic characters – each sporting a suitably diverse balance of abilities – or can choose to customise a unique warrior for themselves. Starting out with knowledge of a single fighting style, you'll find ample opportunity for developing your skills as the game rolls on by becoming versed in any number of the 30 possible styles or concentrating on mastery of a select few.

Fighting styles fall into the three distinct categories of martial arts, magic or weapons-based combat, and each style learnt places up to seven different moves at your disposal for use during battle. Techniques are rated in terms of speed, power and defensive capability, with the lightning-fast strikes of the Centipede style of martial arts offering completely different benefits in battle to the devastating force of a skilfully wielded Broadsword, for instance. Magical abilities are also divided into a wide selection of traditional spells and the rather nifty power to take on the physical form of previously slain demons whose spirits you have collected.

The vast repertoire of fighting techniques players can put together should give rise to some immensely impressive strategic battles (forget your Lightsabers and piddly box of Jedi tricks), which can again be played out in a fluid or more calculated fashion. With a souped-up visual engine and all-new motion capturing to create more intense fight scenes, this could very well be BioWare's most spectacular undertaking yet.

CHOOSE YOUR DESTINY

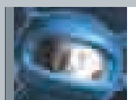
The branching pathways of *Knights Of The Old Republic* that allowed players to shape their character's development towards either the Light or Dark side of the Force are to be expanded further in *Jade Empire*. The destiny of your character will again be shaped by the choices you make, and interactions with the countless NPCs you'll encounter will be affected by your earlier actions. Ultimately paving the way for a range of different endings, the collection of followers who'll eventually assist you on your quest will depend on the type of company your behaviour attracts.

"YOU'LL FIND AMPLE OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME VERSED IN ANY NUMBER OF THE 30 FIGHTING STYLES, OR CONCENTRATE ON MASTERING A SELECT FEW"



Improved textures, increased polygons and all-new lighting techniques take the visuals a step beyond those in *KOTOR*.

Although the game isn't due out until the end of next year, the game world already has a unique flavour.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

BioWare was founded in 1995 in Edmonton, Alberta, by qualified doctors Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk. The studio enjoyed both critical acclaim and commercial success with the *Baldur's Gate* series, and most recently lent its RPG expertise to the *Star Wars* universe in the magnificent *Knights Of The Old Republic.*

HISTORY

- **STAR WARS: KOTOR** 2003 (Xbox, PC)
- **NEVERWINTER NIGHTS** 2002 (PC)
- **BALDUR'S GATE** 1998 (PC)

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

FULL OF EASTERN PROMISE…

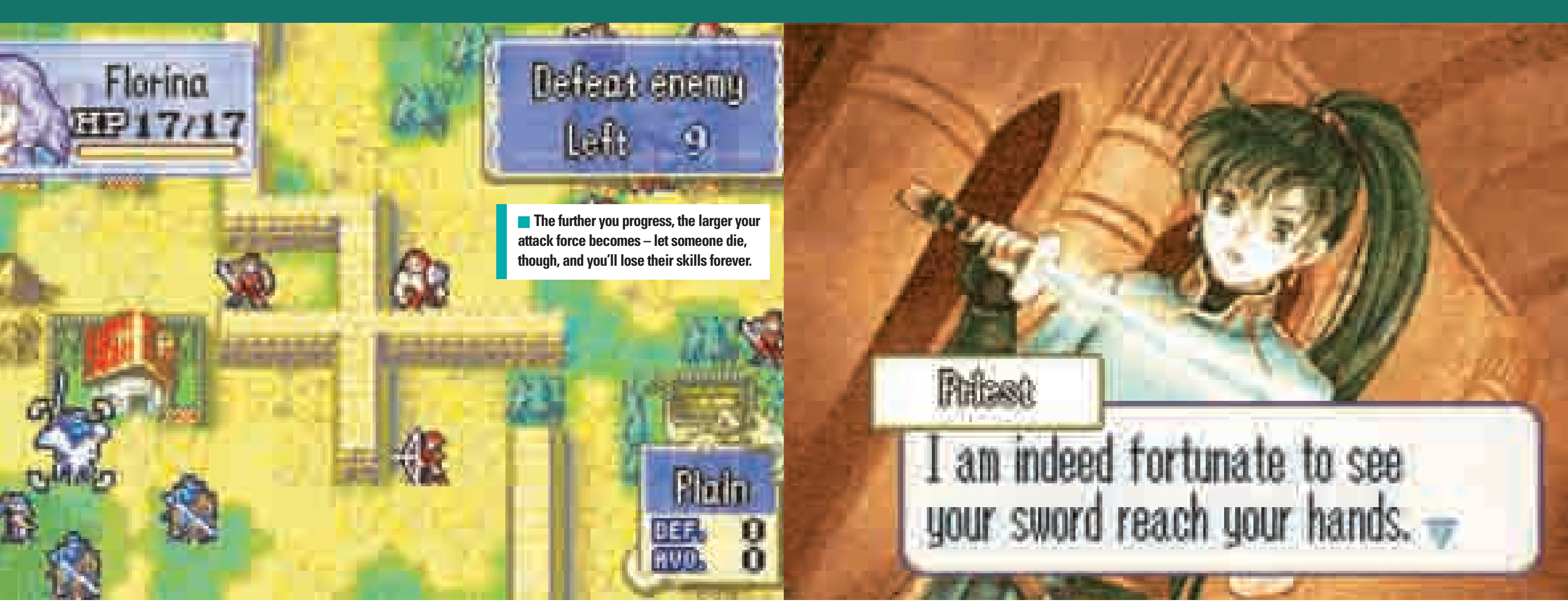
KOTOR + CROUCHING TIGER x MAGIC = JADE EMPIRE

"THE INCREDIBLE SUCCESS OF KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC PROVES THAT BIOWARE KNOWS HOW TO MAKE AN ENGAGING RPG"

ED FRIES, VP GAME CONTENT, MICROSOFT

With 30 fighting styles to choose from, battles should be as diverse as they are spectacular.

FIRE EMBLEM



The further you progress, the larger your attack force becomes – let someone die, though, and you'll lose their skills forever.

DETAILS

FORMAT: GBA
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Intelligent Systems
RELEASE: Q1 '04 (Japan/US: Out Now)
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-2

Take one healthy dose of *Advance Wars*, toss in a pinch of fantasy RPG and simmer for an hour – classic Nintendo cookery.

ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH, DEAR FRIENDS…

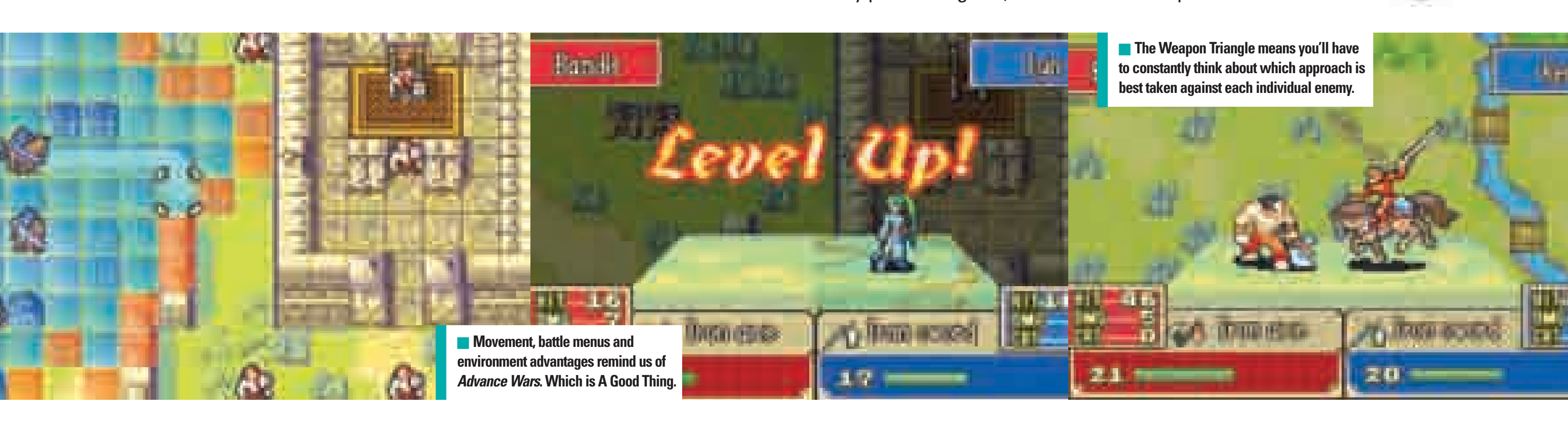
Unlikely as it may seem for a handheld console, turn-based strategy games are the 'in' thing at the moment, thanks mainly to titles like *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*, *Onimusha Tactics* and, of course, *Advance Wars 2*. And with the GBA getting more than its fair share of updated NES and SNES games it'll come as no surprise to hear that Nintendo is set to bring the old-school NES title *Fire Emblem* to the GBA (assuming you've heard of it in the first place, that is).

Short of the appearance of key characters Prince Marth and Roy in *Super Smash Brothers Melee*, the GBA version of *Fire Emblem* marks the franchise's first appearance on Western soil, as the previous five games in the series only came out in Japan. Taking many cues from the last two SNES titles in terms of graphical style, *Fire Emblem* also sticks closely to the strategy-cum-RPG flavour offered by previous games in the series – a style that mirrors several elements from the *Advance Wars* series. Thankfully, *Fire Emblem*'s simplistic interface and user-friendly battle mechanics hide a deep and absorbing game beyond *Advance War*'s basic mission-based structure.

"A GREAT STORY AND THE SIMILARITIES TO ADVANCE WARS COMBINE TO FORM A HIGHLY ADDICTIVE STRATEGY TITLE"

The game leads you in with a handful of tutorial stages that not only give you an idea of how to play, but also allow you to build up your forces for the larger battles later on. This is a key part of the game, as the size of your army is carried forward from chapter to chapter; any men lost on the battlefield will be gone forever, meaning you'll have to plan your movements more carefully and heal any damaged units since there's no way to bring people back from the dead. The fact that the game saves after every turn makes this even more important, as you can't simply turn off your GBA to cancel any mistakes you may have made.

It's the incorporation of other RPG elements as well (such as a strategic 'paper scissors stone'-style Weapon Triangle and Magic system) that helps distinguish *Fire Emblem* as a game in its own right, rather than just an adaptation of the *Advance Wars* games. Hopefully, fans of the genre who aren't aware of *Fire Emblem*'s past will realise this.



Movement, battle menus and environment advantages remind us of *Advance Wars*. Which is A Good Thing.

The Weapon Triangle means you'll have to constantly think about which approach is best taken against each individual enemy.


eMag

FORBIDDEN SIREN



VIDEOGAMES MATHS
MORE SCARES, LESS DARES

SILENT HILL x ERASERHEAD - RESIDENT EVIL = FORBIDDEN SIREN

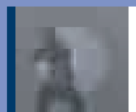
"SIREN IMMERSES THE GAMER IN A CLAUSTROPHOBIC WORLD OF FEAR, MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE"

SONY PRESS RELEASE

■ Strange as it sounds, you'll need to tune into the minds of beings like this if you want to stay alive.

■ For the love of God, don't look in the well. You just know you'll regret it in the morning.

FORBIDDEN SIREN
PLAYSTATION2



DEVELOPER PROFILE

SCEI's first foray into PS2 third-person adventuring went by the name of *Extermination*, a game that was well-received by the few who bought it. Perhaps a better clue to the treats soon to be on offer in *Siren* is the firm's *Dark Cloud* series, which took an old *Zelda*-lite conceit and added a dash of *Sim City*.

HISTORY

- **DARK CLOUD 2** 2003 (PS2)
- **DARK CLOUD** 2002 (PS2)
- **EXTERMINATION** 2001 (PSone)

A SURVIVAL HORROR THAT'S EASY TO BEAM YOUR HEAD AROUND

The survival horror genre has been going now for enough years to declare it staple videogame fare – it used to stand out against the mass of happier, sunnier games and now it's all but disappeared in a cloud of its own clichés. Every now and then, though, a developer tries to put in a fresh dynamic to liven things up a bit. The ability to fall over in panic (*Clock Tower 3*) or take a snapshot (*Perfect Zero*) are but two of a rather small amount of these innovations that fail to stop unlockable doors being incredibly annoying. It has to be said that this genre needs an enema and it looks like *Forbidden Siren* may be the game waiting in the shadows with a lubed-up rubber tube in its necrotic hands.

Taking its atmospheric cues from films such as *The Ring*, *Eraserhead* and *The Fog*, *Siren* gives you control over ten varied personalities who must use their particular skill to survive a world that has gone to hell. The current preview code gives you control over three of them in three separate scenarios with each one showing off part of how the game will function.

Section one sees you as 16-year-old Kyoya Suda who awakens in a pool of blood to find a bullet hole in his chest. Here, a mysterious woman tells you of the game's unique-selling point, Sightjack – a psychic power that allows you to tune in to the point of view of any nearby monsters and see what they see. It seems that Kyoya has lost all his blood, and in its place runs mysterious red water that allows him to use the left analogue stick the same way you'd twiddle a radio tuner. Instead of traffic reports though, he can gain access to the minds of everything alive (or not so alive) on the level. This idea alone makes *Siren* one to watch.

In the second section we're introduced to a schoolteacher, Reiko Takoto, who must escort a child out of a school that has become overrun by what we're sure shouldn't be called zombies. This introduces another element of the game where you can tell the kid to either follow you or stay still and hide, as well as allowing you to lock various doors. With the sound up in a darkened room, this is terrifying stuff. Holding your Sightjack control steady is comparable to holding up a portable aerial in an attempt to gain an image. You'll get a glimpse, then nothing. You manage to hold it on a channel, then move it a micron and be faced with static. So, where is that creature that's relentlessly hammering away at a door? And wasn't that a pistol in the hands of that other… thing? Yes… yes, it was.

Using Sightjack to see where 'they' can see (and therefore avoid them) makes for some truly nerve-jangling moments.

Luckily, some playable characters are armed too but, as with all we've seen in *Siren*, there are catches that keep the fear factor high. An example of this becomes clear with the game's third available character, Akira Shumara; being a 70-year-old hunter means he's a crack shot, but he really isn't too fast on his feet…

Forbidden Siren has fresh and realistic characters and a desolate visual style that makes for a tantalising prospect and a welcome addition to a tired genre. Released in Japan already, this could well be the game to finally make every other survival horror title look like child's play.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: March '04 (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Survival Horror
PLAYERS: 1

Hell breaks loose once more and you must survive using your own wits and ability to see into the mind of unspeakable horror. Ooh, scared…

CUT A SMILE

Getting emotional presence out of a game character can be tricky. Too much and you've got an exaggerated goon fresh from a cartoon adventure; too little and you've got the cast of the first *Resident Evil* game. *Forbidden Siren* manages to give its characters a series of expressions that flesh out their personalities and give them a bit more weight. Their mouths and eyes don't move, but each person's head has a photographic texture map with several different animated expressions. This could seem cheap, but the game's excellent lo-fi horror setting helps gel this style with the detuned cameras and industrial horror soundtrack to make something quite disturbing.

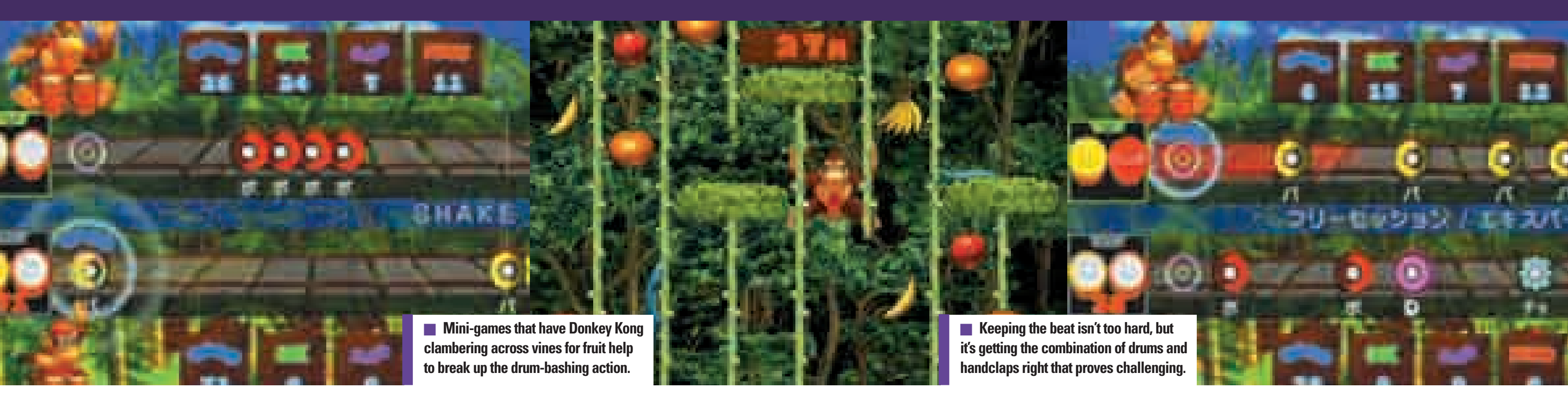
"SONY'S FIRST REAL TRY AT THE SURVIVAL HORROR GENRE COULD BLOW ALL OTHER EXAMPLES OUT OF THE WATER"



It had been an exciting night but the crew of *Badgerwatch* weren't expecting this…

As schoolteacher Reiko you can let the kid follow you or tell her to stay put. Which is safer…?

DONKEY KONGA



■ Mini-games that have Donkey Kong clambering across vines for fruit help to break up the drum-bashing action.

■ Keeping the beat isn't too hard, but it's getting the combination of drums and handclaps right that proves challenging.

THE BIG APE FINALLY GETS HIS FREAK ON

Oh, the humiliation – having once reigned supreme as the basis of Nintendo's success, being relegated to busking with a pair of bongos must be quite a comedown for poor old Donkey Kong. It was certainly something that few of us could have expected, particularly after hearing rumours of a new DK platform adventure. Nevertheless, rhythm games have always been our 'bag' and, as such, the thought of a decent music game for the GameCube is intriguing, although how much interest it'll spark with Western gamers remains to be seen.

We say that simply because the game that *Donkey Konga* is based upon is something of a niche title – despite selling over half a million units in Japan, *Taiko No Tatsujin* (or *Drum Master*) has never been released outside its homeland. This could, of course, have something to do with the game being based around the beating of a traditional Japanese drum-style peripheral with a wooden stick. However, with the help of some changes from Nintendo (in the form of a new bongo-based controller and the Donkey Kong characters), worldwide appeal is but a handclap away. We hope.

Using a modified version of the *Taiko No Tatsujin* engine, *Donkey Konga*'s gameplay sounds a whole lot easier to than it actually is. Beats appear on a moving bar according to the rhythm of the tunes you're listening to, of which there are 32 to choose from. These range from unknown (to us, anyway) Japanese tracks to more familiar ones like *Mambo No. 5*, though this will most likely change for the Western release.

As the beats move down the bar and come level with your character (Donkey or Diddy Kong), you have to hit the bongos according to the marker shown – red for the left drum, yellow for the right, pink for both together or a flash to indicate that you clap your hands, the noise of which is picked up by a microphone built into the bongos. Like we said, though, getting it right (and in time) takes a fair amount of co-ordination. And there's the small matter of having rhythm, something that we know some people can't quite grasp.

Just like SEGA's sublime *Samba De Amigo*, *Donkey Konga* is simple but effective and adds another notch to the GameCube's genre-offering bedpost. It's not clear how appealing such a game will be to a Western audience, but if Nintendo's plan to release the game at a bargain price in Japan is carried over to the West, we reckon you'll see plenty of people dancing to the beat of Donkey Kong's drum.

"A DECENT MUSIC GAME FOR THE GAMECUBE IS AN INTRIGUING IDEA, BUT WILL WESTERN GAMERS PLAY IT?"

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Namco
RELEASE: TBA '04
GENRE: Rhythm
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ Namco brings its PS2 drum-beating title to the GameCube, and then stirs a healthy dose of monkey-based shenanigans into the mix.



■ The whole Donkey Kong clan is set to appear, although only Donkey and Diddy will be pounding the drums.


eMag

JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING



The customary platter of gameplay styles is set to involve both ground- and air-based vehicular combat.

IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S ATTEMPTING RE-ENTRY…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube, GBA
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '04
GENRE: Third-Person Action
PLAYERS: 1-4

Bond is back for another action-packed genre-crossing adventure.

PS2 **Following the massive commercial success of *007: NightFire*, EA was quick to secure exclusive rights to the Bond universe and its back catalogue until the year 2010.** While the developer got off to rather a slow start with its shoddy adaptations of *Tomorrow Never Dies* and *The World Is Not Enough*, since switching the template for its 007 games to original storylines we've seen the quality notably improve. Although the N64's legendary *GoldenEye* will forever give game developers the same inimitable benchmark that the Connery films present to modern-day Hollywood, *NightFire*'s relentless action, fast cars and slick gadgets provided a good enough taste of life as the suave secret agent to appease many critics.

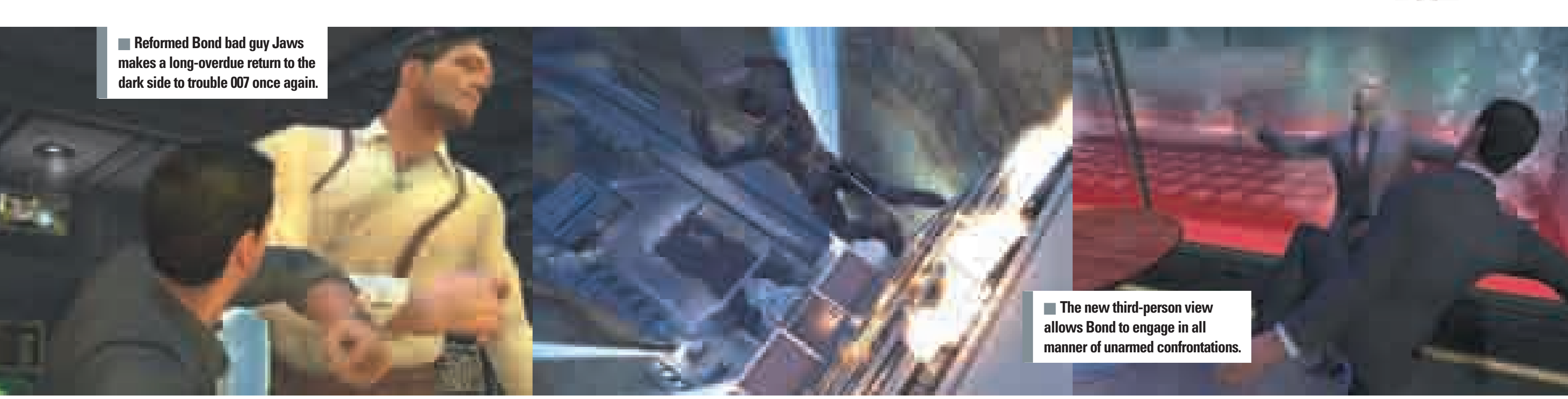
Everything Or Nothing will be the third original Bond adventure from EA, and every effort is clearly being made to ensure it will be his most action-packed outing to date. Not only will the vocal talent and pixel-perfect likeness of Pierce Brosnan once again feature in the game, but a star-studded cast worthy of any 007 movie has

> "EVERY EFFORT IS BEING MADE TO ENSURE THIS WILL BE BOND'S MOST ACTION-PACKED OUTING TO DATE"

been enlisted to appear with our hero. Bond regulars John Cleese and Dame Judi Dench reprise their on-screen roles, and, most intriguingly, Richard Kiel returns as arguably Bond's greatest nemesis, the tungsten-toothed Jaws. Willem Dafoe, Shannon Elizabeth and Heidi Klum also illustrate EA's 'no expense spared' approach to this potential gaming blockbuster, and veteran Bond screenwriter Bruce Fierstein is penning those toe-curling one-liners.

The adventure will span such locales as New Orleans, Moscow, Egypt and darkest Peru, and EA's *Need For Speed* team will again be adding gameplay credibility to the many vehicle-based sections. Tanks, motorbikes and even helicopters are set to join the Aston Martin Vanquish in breaking up the on-foot action, which sees the FPS format ditched in favour of a third-person perspective. We're hoping this stylistic u-turn isn't just because the Brosnan likeness for which EA paid so much was hidden for most of *NightFire*, but will instead allow for the freedom of movement enjoyed by the likes of Max Payne and Sam Fisher.

Either way, we're sure *EON* will again capture the high-octane, albeit shallow, action which defines the Bond universe we know and love.



Reformed Bond bad guy Jaws makes a long-overdue return to the dark side to trouble 007 once again.

The new third-person view allows Bond to engage in all manner of unarmed confrontations.


eMag

RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2

BUCKLE UP AND HOLD ON AS DIGITAL ILLUSIONS TAKES RALLISPORT UP A GEAR

DETAILS
FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Sweden
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Digital Illusions
RELEASE: Q2 '04
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1 (Live compatible)

■ Prepare to be dazzled by a turbo-charged graphics engine all over again as *RalliSport* goes for a spin online.

When Microsoft unleashed its next-generation console on the UK back in March 2002, one of the first titles to really showcase the machine's superiority in the visuals department was the original *RalliSport Challenge*. Swedish developer Digital Illusions was able to fully harness the processing power of the new hardware and deliver some of the most breathtakingly crisp textures ever produced by a console. Yet despite standing head and shoulders above its peers in terms of eye candy, the game definitely wasn't just a pretty face, and players would delight in discovering that the pioneering graphics took a back seat to the genuinely exhilarating gameplay. Needless to say, the title's popularity decreed a sequel was always on the cards but it wasn't until September's X03 that Microsoft announced a follow-up was definitely in the pipeline.

From the early glimpses we've had of *RalliSport Challenge 2*, the game looks set to once again raise the bar for its rivals in terms of sheer visual splendour and attention to detail. With a spanking new graphics engine purring away under the bonnet, players can expect to see their Xbox being pushed to the limit in order to generate a host of stunning new effects. Environments have been made much more interactive, bringing the varied terrain beneath your wheels to life with greater realism than ever as you dislodge rocks and fiercely carve your path through sludge, while enhanced weather effects cause raindrops to skip and skate authentically across your windscreen.

All the memorable touches from the first game – like the movement of individually rendered leaves, or incidental animals running alongside the track – make a welcome return, many being enhanced yet further. Damage modelling in particular has undergone a massive overhaul for the sequel, with an intricate new physics system ensuring your car comes away from every bump and scrape with the appropriate wounds to remember it by. This time around, however, the battle scars won't just be for show as your car's performance will become suitably crippled by any recklessness. We're not talking about some non-specific decline in performance either – the vehicle models are constructed so that the inner workings will be affected in accordance with where the impact occurred.

Keen to avoid direct competition with the likes of mighty Mr McRae, *RC2* continues to focus on the more arcade-style handling that made its predecessor such an entertaining ride. Again injecting an overblown dose of speed into proceedings while granting players some rather forgiving control when it comes to cornering, the game somehow still manages to capture all the danger and intensity associated with off-road racing.

Perhaps realising that the obvious multiplayer potential of *RalliSport* was surprisingly underdeveloped in the original, Digital Illusions has more than addressed this minor gripe by providing players with a whole world of possible opponents through the ever-evolving wonders of Xbox Live. Possibly the most notable addition to the sequel, *RC2* will become the first racing game on Microsoft's XSN gaming network that will enable enthusiasts and beginners alike to compete in customised tournaments when this enhanced slice of high-octane action becomes available to us all next spring.

MORE IS BETTER

Aside from spectacular new visuals, an impressive physics engine and online capabilities, no racing sequel would be complete without its share of all-new tracks, vehicles and modes. *RalliSport Challenge 2* will boast almost twice as many tracks as the original, including a range of terrains and weather conditions. The choice of vehicles will feature 40 licensed cars complete with official sponsorship, and the infamous 'Group B' models. The new Crossover duel joins the last game's against-the-clock Rally mode, circuit-based Rallycross, treacherous Ice Racing and point-to-point Hill Climb.

"RC2 HAS THE ARCADE-STYLE HANDLING THAT MADE ITS PREDECESSOR SUCH FUN"



■ The graphical detail has been taken up another notch, but just remember to keep your eyes on the road…

■ Since the visible damage will degrade your car's performance this time, it's worth steering clear of trouble.



PUBLISHER PROFILE

Work began on Digital Illusions' debut title, *Pinball Dreams*, back in 1989 while its developers were still at school, and in 1992 the game was eventually published for the Amiga. Ten years later the studio was adding the likes of *Battlefield 1942* and *RalliSport Challenge* to its portfolio.

HISTORY

- **MIDTOWN MADNESS 3** 2003 (Xbox)
- **BATTLEFIELD 1942** 2002 (PC)
- **RALLISPORT CHALLENGE** 2002 (Xbox)

"RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2 EMBODIES THE ENERGY, PASSION AND THRILL OF RALLY RACING"

MICROSOFT PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

STEPPING UP A GEAR

RALLISPORT CHALLENGE + REAL DAMAGE x ONLINE = RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2

With the success of previous project *Midtown Madness 3*, we've no reason to doubt *RalliSport's* online potential.

A total of 40 cars will make an appearance in the sequel, including the untameable Group B death traps.

PHANTASY STAR ONLINE EP. III: C.A.R.D. REVOLUTION



■ Each card has its own range and power, so you'll have to fully engage the grey matter to get the most out of your deck.

THIS IS HARDLY THE ONLINE REVOLUTION WE ENVISAGED…

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: Sonic Team
RELEASE: TBC 2004 (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ Sonic Team takes what is arguably the most popular online console game in a bold new direction by giving it the *Yu-Gi-Oh!* treatment. The jury's still out…

In the past, we've made our opinions known about constant and cynical rehashes of the same old games year in, year out. But, believe it or not, there's a little-known polar opposite that is almost as bad. Very occasionally, a firm decides to ditch all its hard work on a series and abandon all its good ideas in order to try something completely off the wall.

Admittedly, this isn't so bad when the end result is an outstanding feat of brilliance, but when a popular franchise such as *Phantasy Star* is turned from a globally playable (if limited) RPG into a niche card battler, you do have to ask a few questions. Clearly a product aimed at the Japanese market, SEGA's latest tangent (don't get us started on *Sonic Battle*…) looks to be all about brains over beauty. Just as well, really.

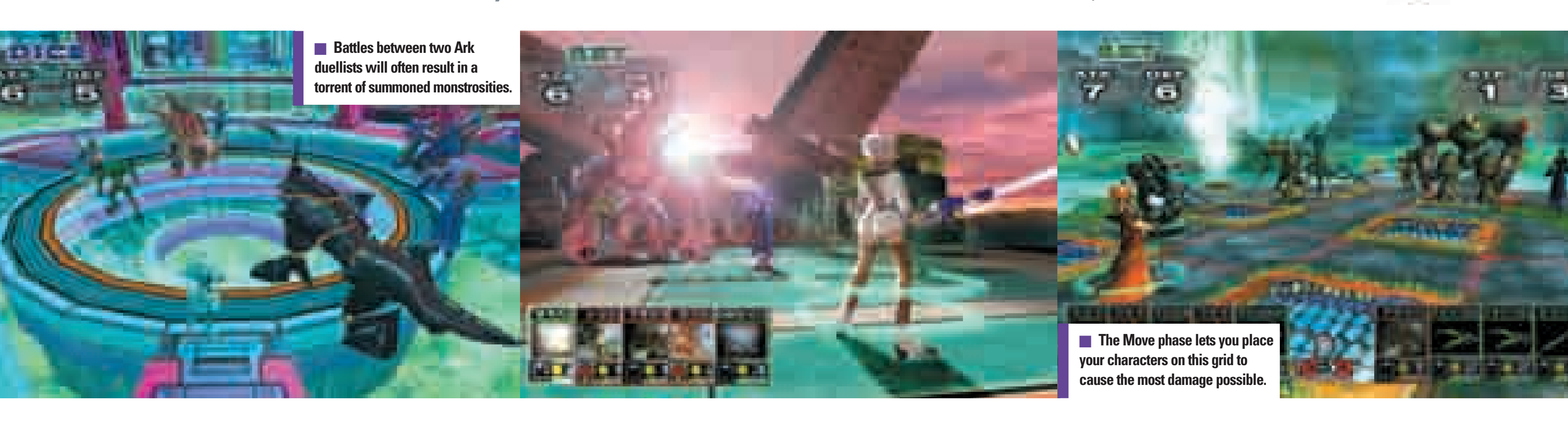
While it may not be the obvious progression for the series, *Episode III: C.A.R.D. Revolution* is certainly an interesting prospect and part of us is horribly intrigued. We've been caught out by this before – a previous incident led to an inexplicable outbreak of *Yu-Gi-Oh!* GBA games – but Sonic Team's attempt to break into the card battling market seems every bit as technically competent as its rivals.

Action is much like the *Mega Man Transmission* GBA titles, only in a slightly more complex and turn-based guise. Assemble a deck based on your created character (items and weapons for the Hunters or summon creatures for Ark warriors) and pit it against that of your opponent; it's been done countless times before but SEGA is never one to be outdone and has something of a cunning trick up its sleeve.

Basically, a real-world version of the card game will soon become available in Japan, and with e-Reader encoding on each of the physical cards you'll be able to use your own real-life deck in the game. The catch, as you may expect, is that you'll probably need to live in Japan to do so as there's no word yet on whether the tabletop game will ever leave the East.

Online play and multiplayer modes should make up for the game's relatively underwhelming front end (which, in fairness, is never really a strong point in this genre anyway) and our brief encounter with the Japanese version has really whet our appetite to get stuck into a copy where we can comprehend its every intricacy and level of depth. Here's hoping our curiosity doesn't kill our proverbial cat…

"THIS ONE LOOKS TO BE ALL ABOUT BRAINS OVER BEAUTY. JUST AS WELL, REALLY"



■ Battles between two Ark duellists will often result in a torrent of summoned monstrosities.

■ The Move phase lets you place your characters on this grid to cause the most damage possible.


eMag

MAFIA



Vehicles can be hijacked but the real fun comes when the car owner chases you to get his prized possession back.

Cut-scenes are driven by superb voice acting and motion capture. And there are ladies and everything. Woo.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: Czech Republic
PUBLISHER: Gathering
DEVELOPER: Illusion Softworks
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Italian-style PC antics come to consoles as *Mafia* gets ported.

BADDA BOOM BADDA BING – SHOULD VERCETTI SLEEP WITH AN EYE OPEN?

PS2 ***Grand Theft Auto III* has a lot to answer for.** Ever since the genre-spanning crime spree and its sequel blasted onto consoles, we've seen a steady influx of similar games follow in its footprints. *The Getaway*, *True Crime: Streets Of LA* and *Driver 3* have all recreated the combination of realistic driving and on-foot shooting. And now it's time to practise kissing your fingers because they'll soon be joined by the console release of *Mafia*, an Italian crime sim that won us over on PC last year.

Mafia has much in common with *GTA* and its ilk, most of your time being spent on foot or on wheels. You need to observe road-laws when behind the steering wheel, otherwise you'll draw unwanted attention from the local police. On-foot missions don't offer too many surprises either, ranging from simple tasks such as escorting your friend home to more risky jobs like 'whacking' a rival crime boss.

The setting gives *Mafia* a unique feel, with the Thirties Italy ambience extending to the dialogue, soundtrack and ambience. For example, the cars could have been lifted straight from a *Godfather* film – the tyre on the doors and over-sized headlights might be just a few of the lazy Italian mobster clichés here but they add to the atmosphere and are just what *Mafia* needs. The detail even goes down to the working-class pedestrians wearing braces and the mafia members with slicked-back hair.

In fact, the visuals are some of the most impressive we've seen on the PS2, with highly detailed faces and superb motion-captured animation. The only complaints we can level at the game's looks is that the draw-in distance isn't too impressive, with the Italian weather seemingly suffering from ever-present fog. Nevertheless Mafia looks set to do a great job of convincing you that you're part of an Italian crime network.

Our real concern so far, aside from the perpetual mist, is the time it takes to load. We expect loading times to be optimised before review code arrives but even allowing for that, the waits are shocking – one mid-level load clocked in at a hefty two minutes. It breaks up the rhythm of the game and potentially discourages that 'quick five minute go' that turns into hours, in which the *GTA* series specialised. Even so, *Mafia* has piqued our interest and we look forward to seeing if the game lives up to its lofty ambitions.



Your connections will kit you out with decent weapons, usually to 'persuade' someone to part with information.

"MAFIA COULD SURPRISE MANY CONSOLE OWNERS BUT THE LOADING TIMES ARE A WORRY"


eMag

THE MOVIES



"PLAYERS CAN MAKE EVERY KIND OF FILM, FROM ACTION FLICKS TO TEEN COMEDIES, SUSPENSE FILMS, THRILLERS AND HORROR MOVIES"

ACTIVISION PRESS RELEASE

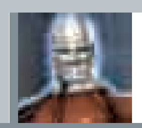
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

NEXT YEAR'S SUMMER BLOCKBUSTER?

THEME PARK - ROLLERCOASTERS x FILM MAKING = THE MOVIES

Shock audiences with obscene levels of violence, or tone things down to accommodate a wider range of tastes.

Splashing out on sets and props will provide a greater variety of backdrops for movies to be filmed against.



PUBLISHER PROFILE

■ Formed in 1979 by a group of former Atari programmers, Activision was the first independent videogame publisher. Over the last decade and a half the company has expanded its offices worldwide, and currently holds publishing rights to the likes of *Rome: Total War*, *Doom III* and *Quake IV*.

HISTORY

- **STAR WARS: KOTOR** 2003 (Xbox)
- **TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER** 1999 (PSone)
- **QUAKE II** 1997 (PC)

THE SIMS 2 WON'T BE THE ONLY EPIC GAMING CONCEPT IN 2004…

PS2 **Peter Molyneux has never been short of an original idea or two, and his team of talented developers has always managed to turn his ambitious designs into ground-breaking reality.** But the challenge he's set for his Lionhead Studio staff with latest brainchild *The Movies* looks to push the developmental boat out further than ever, and if they actually deliver half of what this game is promising to be, it may well turn out to be Molyneux's finest creation to date. And with the likes of *Theme Park* and *Syndicate* among his portfolio of past masterpieces, that's not the kind of claim we'd throw around without good reason.

The main premise of the game is to take players on an epic journey from the dawn of the silent film industry right through to the age of computer-generated effects and beyond, during which time your objective will be to expand a barren plot of land into a thriving movie production empire. Players are placed in direct control of everything from building the facilities they'll need to create those potential Hollywood blockbusters, through to actually directing the on-screen action itself. Ambitiously blending such a complex collection of interrelated macro-management, micro-management and movie direction elements, the scope of your destiny in the cut-throat world of showbusiness appears to be almost limitless.

To begin with, your vacant lot must be furnished with the basics of a set design studio, a couple of gifted scriptwriters and a simple lighting and camera set-up. Once you've got a winning script on your hands (or your funds are running so low it becomes a case of sending any old B-movie junk out of your doors just to get some cash rolling in), you'll then be faced with putting together a suitable cast and crew to start making the magic happen.

A galaxy of stars will become available for casting as your career progresses, each with a unique set of attributes and expertise in particular roles. While an A-list celebrity is guaranteed to draw in the crowds, chances are your early low-budget projects will only allow for a troupe of undiscovered actors eager to make their mark on the industry. Come up with a box-office smash and their profile will rise accordingly, transforming them overnight from starry-eyed, eager-to-please rookies into arrogant big-name pin-ups with unreasonable salary demands. Dealing with the outrageous needs of the big screen idols presents yet another side to your directorial duties.

After getting a few successes under your belt, you'll want to research new technologies to ensure your creations keep up with the increasing demands of the movie-going public. More interesting props, bigger and better sets, higher quality production techniques, and dazzling special effects will add of appeal to your films.

The completely freeform path your career can take makes for some mind-bogglingly diverse possibilities, and whether you become known as the next Spielberg for your sci-fi box-office smashes, or the next Tarantino as the critics lap up your latest gangster epic is entirely up to you. If *The Movies* ends up cashing the cheques its hype is currently writing, we're in for a real treat come mid 2004.

"IF THE MOVIES ENDS UP CASHING HALF THE CHEQUES ITS HYPE IS CURRENTLY WRITING, WE'RE IN FOR A REAL TREAT"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Lionhead Studios
RELEASE: TBC '04
GENRE: Management
PLAYERS: 1

■ Build up a movie empire by creating the films you want, with the stars you choose, on the sets you build.

MAKING MOVIES

Perhaps the most ambitious aspect of *The Movies* will be the creation of the miniature features themselves. Once you've put together your sets, rigged them with props and kitted your stars out in their costumes and make-up it's time to get the cameras rolling. As director you'll get to call all the shots, ensuring the most dramatic camera angles are used and the lighting captures the mood perfectly. A series of sliding bars then allows you to influence the intensity of your characters' actions – such as the level of violence featured in a fight scene or how steamy or tame you wish the love scenes to be – in accordance with the type of audience you want to attract.





■ Invest all your resources in one great script and top-notch actors, or churn out a stream of low-budget B-movies.

R: RACING EVOLUTION

90-DEGREE POWERSLIDING IS OUT, BRAKING EARLY IS IN

When *Ridge Racer* first appeared in arcades in 1995, it quickly found a place in gamers' hearts thanks to its comical powerslides and an undemanding approach to racing. While this set the game apart at the time, it's worth bearing in mind that back then there was no *Project Gotham Racing*, and *Gran Turismo* was little more than a twinkle in Kazunori Yamauchi's eye. These games have now overtaken Namco's flagship series, so in order to claw back some of the popularity lost over the years, it's taking the simulation road instead of burning down the old arcade route.

The upgradeable real-life vehicles, including the Nissan Skyline and Dodge Viper, reinforce Namco's new-found quest for realism, and the handling has also been altered – the notorious powerslides from previous games are still possible, only they're harder to pull off and not as exaggerated. Even the tracks look more like real race circuits than the fantasy settings of old, all of which adds up to an experience that has more in common with *Gran Turismo* than any arcade racers.

Also making its series debut is the Pressure Meter. Sticking close to the tail end of another driver will see this meter appear above his car. Staying behind the car and putting him under pressure will increase this gauge to show the driver's stress – the more the meter fills, the more likely he is to make a mistake. It's not just there for your advantage either, as rival cars can also put the heat on you, which makes cornering and braking tougher until you can shake your pursuer off. It adds a novel twist to the racing but also seems to be somewhat contradictory to *Racing Evolution*'s nod towards pure simulation.

R: Racing Evolution will also mark the series' first multiformat expedition, so it will have the unenviable task of fending off competition from both *PGR2* and *Gran Turismo 4*. The title might be changed to *Racing Evolution* but has the gameplay evolved sufficiently to recapture our interest? We're not entirely convinced yet, but there's still some mileage left to run before it crosses the finish line…

No word on car damage, but while we don't advocate gambling, we're willing to bet cars can't be smashed up.

"THE INGENIOUS PRESSURE METER IS A GENUINE SURPRISE IN A GENRE WHERE INNOVATION IS RARE"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Namco
DEVELOPER: In-house
RELEASE: TBA (Japan: Out Now, US: 9 December)
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-2

Ridge Racer sheds its arcade skin to gun for *Gran Turismo*'s simulation glory.



The *Ridge Racer* games were famous for their pristine cars, and the motors here are just as good.

Dirt rallies are uncharted territory for Namco, so it'll be interesting to see how it fares.


eMag

SOCOM II: U.S. NAVY SEALS

CAN THE SEALS MAKE ANOTHER BIG SPLASH FOR SONY?

DETAILS
FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Zipper Interactive
RELEASE: February '04 (US: Out Now)
GENRE: Tactical Shooter
PLAYERS: 1 (2-16 Online)

■ Sony's flagship online shooter returns with more weapons, a visual makeover and better offline play.

PS2 **As online console gaming continues to grow in popularity, one genre in particular that appears to have found itself at home with the new medium is the tactical squad-based shooter.** Largely thanks to efforts by developers to fully harness the potential of the microphone headset, not only are players treated to the endless joys of gunning each other down in cold blood but are now being encouraged more than ever to work closely with their team-mates as a co-ordinated unit.

The original *SOCOM* spearheaded the UK launch of Sony's online service earlier this year, and has remained the key title in its portfolio receiving more plays per day from US gamers than even the mighty *Battlefield 1942* on PC. Yet with big-hitters like *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3* and *Counter-Strike* lining up for Xbox Live as we speak, the PS2 is in dire need of another *SOCOM* in its arsenal to stem the tide. And thanks to the Zipper Interactive team behind the first game, that's precisely what it's going to get.

While the series' immense US fanbase already have their mitts on the tantalising *SOCOM* sequel, we'll have to wait until February for the servers to go live on this side of the pond. As you'd imagine, due to the phenomenal success of the first game and relatively short space of time in which the second has been produced, the foundations of the original have remained firmly in place for *SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs* to build upon. Don't expect to find too many changes to the existing formula, but what will be clearly evident is a hearty dose of general enhancements and liberal application of polish across the board.

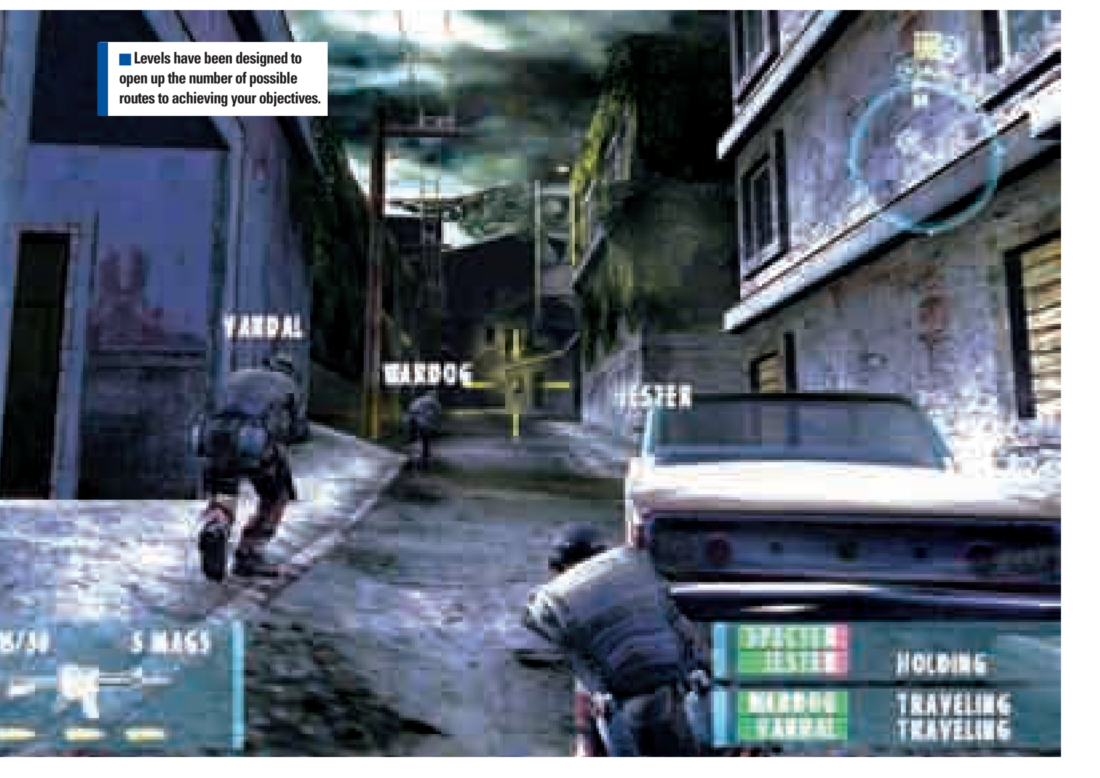
The most significant improvements have been made to the single-player portion of the game, perhaps to bring the series up to speed with those Xbox Live titles that appeal even to those without an online connection. The AI has undergone a particular revamp to ensure taking on the enemy threat will present more of an involving challenge than before, whilst your squad-mates will thankfully also benefit from heightened intellect.

If there was a major criticism with *SOCOM* it had to be the apparent onus placed on the online aspect of play, which never enabled players to emulate the precision squad manoeuvres possible with human team-mates when playing alone. This time around, however, we're assured that your computer-controlled buddies have been subjected to an intensive training course on stealthy movement and how not to blow your ruddy cover at the most inopportune moments.

You'll be able to issue a series of more intricate commands in the single-player mode thanks to an enhanced voice recognition system, and a beefed up storyline will take in the suitably varied sights of Russia, Brazil, Albania and Algeria over the course of 12 brand-new missions. A dozen new levels also await online players, and ten maps from the last game reappear, complete with the all-new complement of gun turrets and graphical tweaks featured throughout the sequel.

With improvements to just about every area of play and several interesting new tricks up its sleeve, *SOCOM II* will be hotly awaited by Sony's online contingent and could prove crucial in the ongoing battle with Xbox Live.

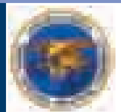
> **"SOCOM II COULD BE A CRUCIAL WEAPON IN THE ONGOING BATTLE WITH XBOX LIVE"**



■ Levels have been designed to open up the number of possible routes to achieving your objectives.

NEW KIDS IN TOWN

Joining Demolition, Extraction and Suppression in *SOCOM II*'s line-up of multiplayer game modes are two newcomers – Breach and Escort. Players joining the Navy SEALs team in a game of Breach will be tasked with infiltrating and destroying a key location, while the team of terrorists will be rather keen on stopping them. Escort, on the other hand, sees the good guys shepherding a group of VIPs to an extraction point while the hostile team tries to make their job as hazardous as possible. Zipper has introduced a ranking system that rewards good performances, and custom games can be set up to ensure only beginners or experts are involved.



CONSULTANT PROFILE

Zipper worked closely with the US Naval Special Warfare Command in order to achieve a high degree of authenticity for the *SOCOM* games. The NSW currently oversees deployment of some 2,450 active Navy SEAL operatives on covert missions of key importance to US and global security.

HISTORY

- **DESERT STORM** (1990)
- **PRESENCE IN VIETNAM** (1966)
- **SEAL TEAMS COMMISSIONED** (1962)

New voice commands can be issued to your AI squad-mates, including lookout and sniper duties.

"ROBUST COMMUNICATION IMPROVEMENTS MAKE SOCOM II ONE OF THE MOST INTERACTIVE AND DYNAMIC TEAM-BASED GAMES AVAILABLE"

SCEE PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

TAKING IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

SOCOM + POLISH x HINDSIGHT = SOCOM II

Missions are staged in a selection of locales, at different times of day and in various weather conditions.

The single-player campaign is knitted together with a much more wholesome storyline.

MARIO GOLF: ADVANCE TOUR


Advance Tour keeps the viewpoint slightly zoomed out so you can see more of the course.

Between rounds, you can visit clubhouses to check out the competition and enter tournaments.

ANOTHER ROUND OF TEE AND BISCUITS FOR NINTENDO

DETAILS

FORMAT: Game Boy Advance
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Camelot
RELEASE: TBA '04
GENRE: Sports
PLAYERS: 1-4

Mario Golf comes to the GBA, with its own courses and plenty of link-up options for those with the GameCube version too.

Of all the companies to have developed games simultaneously for the GameCube and Game Boy Advance, it's really only been Nintendo and its second-party developers who've made regular use of the connectivity between the two formats. That's why when Camelot – creators of the original *Mario Golf*, *Mario Tennis* and the *Golden Sun* series – announced that it was working on not one, but two versions of a new *Mario Golf* game for the GameCube and the GBA, it didn't take a genius to work out the selling point for both titles.

Thankfully, we've since had the pleasure of learning that *Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour* for the GameCube is a more than decent enough game in its own right, regardless of what link-up options it might use in the future. And so we've got similar hopes for *Mario Golf: Advance Tour* – particularly since it promises to have a variety of its own courses, characters and even special modes just like its GameCube cousin.

Judging by the look of these screenshots, fans of *Mario Golf* on the Game Boy Color may be impressed by *Advance Tour*'s new look, as it seems to be a marked improvement over the original. Thanks to some unique graphical effects *Advance Tour* features a scaled view of each course as opposed to a simpler top-down aspect – something that the more keen-eyed amongst you will notice is taken straight from the roaming world map sections of the *Golden Sun* games. Indeed, much of the graphical style appears to borrow from Camelot's RPG series, though this isn't really a bad thing.

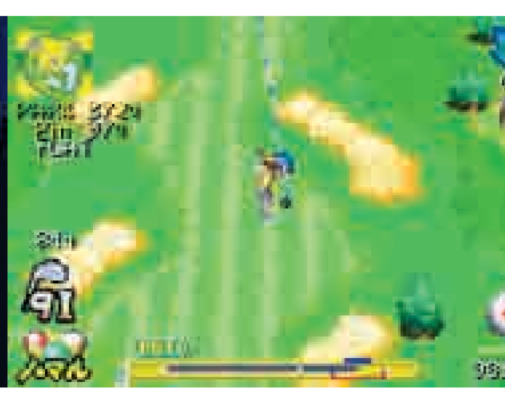
> "THE VISUAL STYLE SEEMS TO COME FROM THE GOLDEN SUN SERIES, WHICH IS A GOOD THING"

While the screenshots certainly give us a taste of how much better the game looks, Nintendo is still keeping relatively quiet about more specific details such as which stalwart characters are going to be in the game. However, the fact that a selection of non-Nintendo golfers will be available to be ported across into your GameCube is pretty much a given – no doubt you'll also be able to build them up through the GBA game's Career mode before doing so.

Either way, *Advance Tour* is already shaping up to be one of the key GBA releases in 2004 and will no doubt give us an idea of how good *Mario Tennis* is going to be…

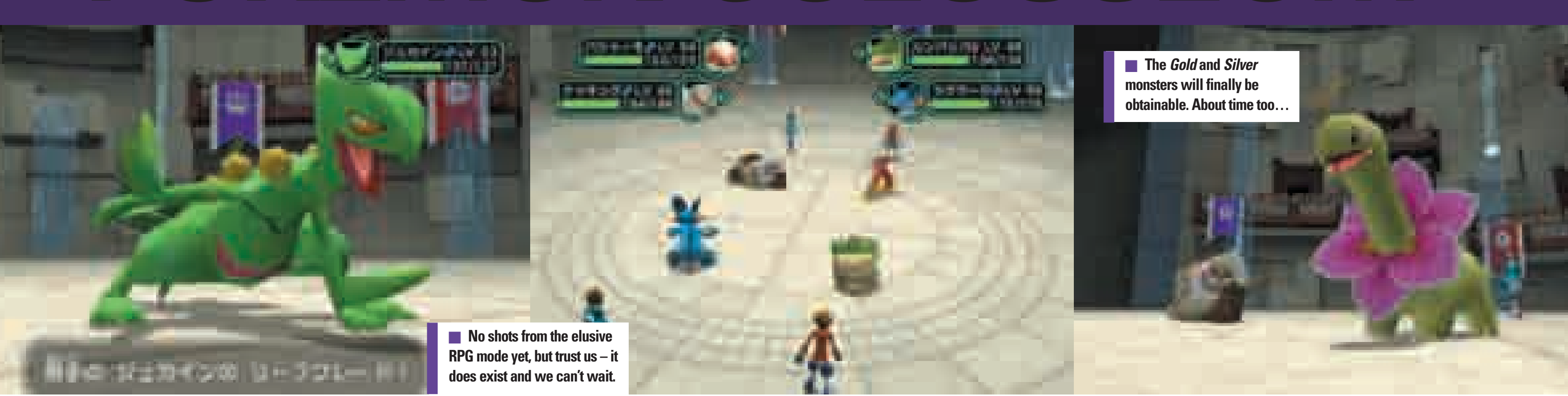


Score well and you'll get to show off in style, complete with cheering crowds and a shower of confetti.




eMag

POKÉMON COLOSSEUM



The *Gold* and *Silver* monsters will finally be obtainable. About time too…

No shots from the elusive RPG mode yet, but trust us – it does exist and we can't wait.

FEAR NOT, TRAINERS, THIS IS MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Despite the faltering popularity of Pokémon anime and merchandise, nothing seems to be able to stand between Nintendo's monster-catching adventures and regular number one spots. Even the less desirable cash-ins have sent Japan Poké-mental, and if anyone would care to explain the popularity of *Pokémon Box* to us, we're all ears. One major bone of contention thus far has been the *Stadium* series; while dedicated trainers have revelled in the opportunity to transfer all their pixellated hard work on the GBA into glorious polygons, most gamers seem oblivious to the appeal.

There's also the argument that development time would be better used on a true Pokémon RPG for the Cube, something every fan would swoon over and something that has been continually promised by an ever-teasing Nintendo. But as it happens, it looks like the plan is to take down both birds with one all-encompassing stone.

On one hand, *Pokémon Colosseum* is another *Stadium* title. Players are encouraged to use Nintendo's oft-touted connectivity and upload their trained squad of colourful animal hybrids to do battle on the big screen. By way of incentive, the cunning developers have tucked away all the missing *Gold* and *Silver* Pokémon for the committed *Colosseum* visitor to recapture, thus solving the 'missing monster mystery' of *Ruby* and *Sapphire*. Good work, gang

On the other hand, new information straight out of Japan speaks of a fully-fledged RPG mode as part of the game. Following the story of an evil trainer who takes pleasure in turning Pokémon to the dark side, we've been promised an epic quest that should delight those who (with good reason) assumed that this would be nothing but a glorified battle arena.

Then, of course, there's all the givens – *Colosseum* looks and sounds every bit as good as you'd expect, and so long as we get our mini-game fix we'll be there waiting outside the shops on release day. Extras such as the GBA Player-style connectivity that graced the previous games would also be a bonus but details on such features are currently scarce.

With the bizarre *Pokémon Channel* and the utterly pointless *Pokémon Box* also due some time next year, this looks set to be the pick of the bunch, but it remains to be seen whether the separate RPG that has been in the works is still a goer. We certainly hope so, but in the meantime news of this unexpected gem will tide us over until we find out for sure. You can be certain that you haven't heard the last of Pikachu and friends yet…

"SO LONG AS WE GET OUR MINI-GAME FIX, WE'LL BE THERE WAITING OUTSIDE THE SHOPS ON RELEASE DAY"

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Game Freak
RELEASE: TBC '04 (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1-4

You know that GameCube Poké-RPG you've always dreamed of? It's a reality… And it's hidden in *Colosseum*.



Any Pokéfan will get a kick (however minor) out of uploading their lovingly created team onto the big screen.


eMag

ARC THE LAD: TWILIGHT OF THE SPIRITS



■ Character models (and graphics in general) are decent enough, if a little primitive in places.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: Cattle Call
RELEASE: Q1 '04
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

■ More strategy RPG action as Europe once again tunes into a popular import series during the ad break. Don't expect any big surprises…

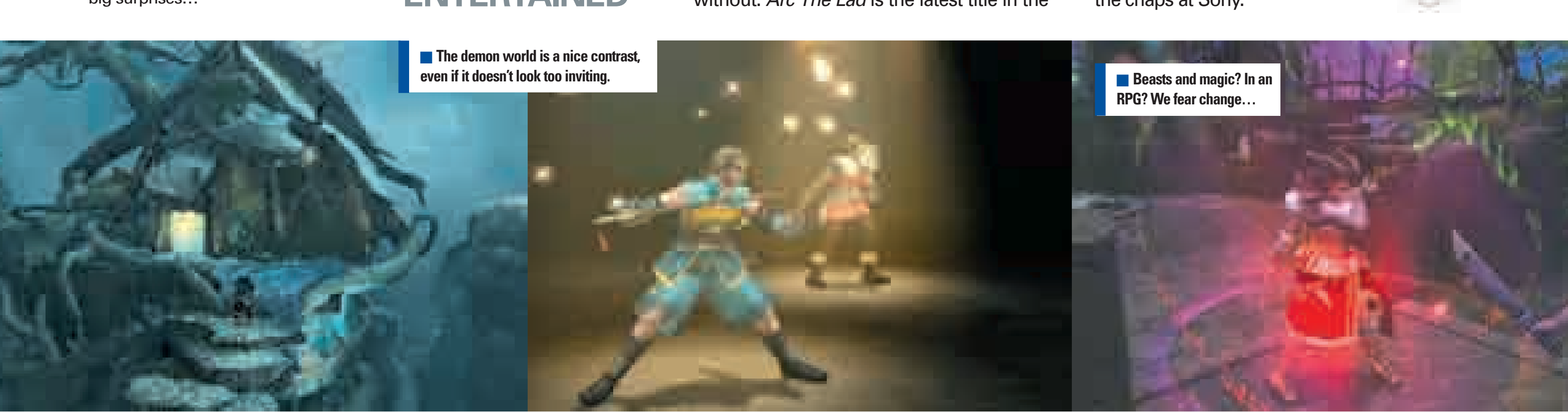
BETTER LATE THAN NEVER, EH, PAL?

We're not sure whether European and American markets are actually changing or whether firms are just looking to new (i.e. foreign) titles to easily expand their catalogues. Either way, more and more once unknown franchises are finding their way onto domestic shelves, often halfway through the series. The trend started a while ago – *Final Fantasy VII* was the first to get a PAL release – and though it can be a little confusing to join in after everyone else, at least it's better than going without. *Arc The Lad* is the latest title in the string of recently localised titles to follow the likes of *Fire Emblem*, *Front Mission* and even *Final Fantasy* into battle.

Hiding beneath a smooth veneer of pretty visuals and all the RPG clichés you can eat, *Arc The Lad* is a by-the-numbers strategy RPG. Familiar spells, outlandish enemies and repetitive victory quotes all hark back to the 8- and 16-bit eras, but then how many RPGs these days can claim a substantial degree of innovation? Yet despite the many elements that we've seen countless times before, *Twilight* still manages to create an interesting game world in which the done-to-death yet well-told tale can unravel. The plot revolves around the premise of a demon land and a human land, although more specifically a pair of brothers of the same bloodline who grow up in these different worlds. Let's just say it's a safe bet that the two will overcome an immense hatred of one another to fight side by side.

We've put a bit of time into both the US import and early PAL versions and they're pretty similar, leading us to believe that while it will be absent from Christmas lists, *Arc* should fill the quiet New Year period rather nicely. Naturally, the traditional nature of the action and storyline means that *Twilight Of The Spirits* will be one almost exclusively for fans of the genre and will lack the appeal of more renowned franchises and commercially viable titles such as *Final Fantasy* and *Advance Wars* respectively. This is a shame as it's clear this will be a solid title that will all but certainly fall flat on its face without a hefty but unlikely marketing push from the chaps at Sony.

> "CLICHÉD IT MAY BE, BUT ARC LOOKS SOLID ENOUGH TO KEEP US ENTERTAINED"



■ The demon world is a nice contrast, even if it doesn't look too inviting.

■ Beasts and magic? In an RPG? We fear change…


eMag

SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

FIREFIGHTER FD:18

HOSES AT THE READY, GENTLEMEN

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Release: TBA '04
Genre: Action/Adventure
Players: 1



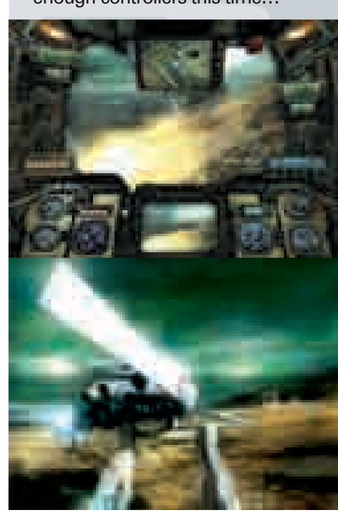
Think *Silent Hill*, but with fire instead of slavering monsters and a dash of flame-beating movie *Backdraft* thrown in. That pretty much sums up Konami's heroic new title, *Firefighter FD:18*. With a more serious take on the task of firefighting than previous titles (*Roscoe McQueen: Firefighter Extreme*, anyone?), the game has you embroiled in an arsonist's plot to start fires in some of a city's largest buildings. Obviously, how well the game's physics simulate the ferocity of fire is going to be important, though from what we've seen so far, everything from chemical explosions to backdrafts (as well as a wealth of firefighting equipment) helps add atmosphere.

STEEL BATTALION: LINE OF CONTACT

RISE OF THE ROBOTS, IT AIN'T

Format: Xbox
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-House
Release: Q1 '04
Genre: Mecha
Players: 1-10

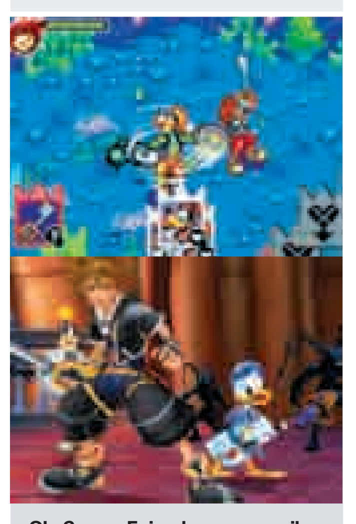
As inevitable as a sequel was for a game that required a controller bigger than most coffee tables (and despite the fact that we felt the last title was a trifle lacklustre), we've already got fairly high hopes for Capcom's robot-blasting follow-up. Why? Probably because it not only promises more mechs and even more intensive missions, but also complete compatibility with Xbox Live. The thought of five-on-five mech-based action, complete with players being able to bark orders at each other through their Live headsets, is something that could work incredibly well and help to relieve the sterile feeling of the original. Let's hope Capcom releases enough controllers this time…



KINGDOM HEARTS

OOH, I 'ATE THAT DUCK

Format: PlayStation2/GBA
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sony/Nintendo
Developer: Square-Enix
Release: TBA '04
Genre: RPG
Players: 1



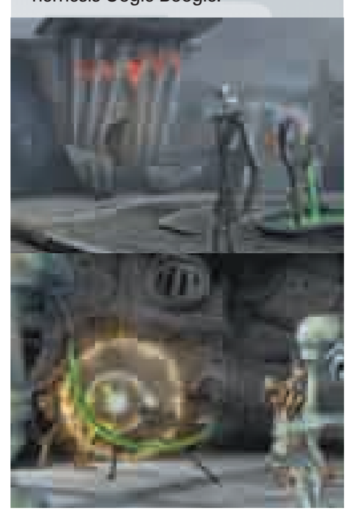
Oh, Square Enix – how you spoil us. Okay, so the constant delays of numerous *Final Fantasy* titles aren't exactly warranted, but at least when it comes to announcing new titles (not one, but two original *Kingdom Hearts* games), we can forgive you. Nearly. Being Square Enix games, details are rather scarce at the moment but some facts are known: *Kingdom Hearts II* on the PlayStation2 picks up where the last game left off and sees Sora and his friends enjoying even more Disney RPG goodness, while *Kingdom Hearts: Chain Of Memories* for the GBA looks to be more of a *Sword Of Mana*-styled title with the same high production values. And you know what? They both look great.

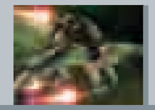
THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

WHAT'S THIS? WHAT'S THIS…

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Buena Vista/Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Release: Q4 '04
Genre: Action/Adventure
Players: TBC

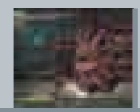
It certainly doesn't seem like a decade has passed since Tim Burton invited cinema audiences to step inside the darkly comic world of *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, but Disney has enlisted Capcom to mark the occasion with a gaming sequel. Although not due for release until next Christmas, publishing partnership Buena Vista and Capcom is already touting the game as something rather special. The movie's award-winning art director, Deane Taylor, has been brought in to ensure the game captures the unique ambience of Halloween Town, while the action will again follow Jack Skellington's efforts to thwart the evil schemes of arch nemesis Oogie Boogie.





DELAYED – X²: THE THREAT

■ Koch's dominating space-based shooter should have already been out by now, but insider sources confirm that the game has now slipped back and has a revised release date of February '04.



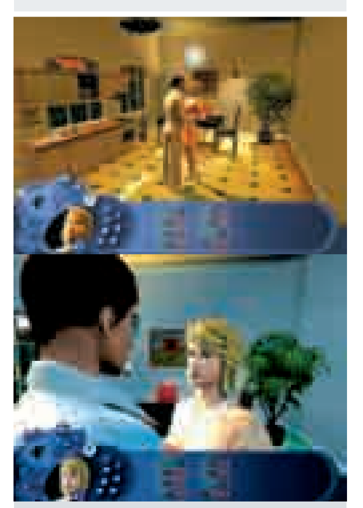
ADVANCED – CASTLEVANIA

■ Yes, you read it right – Konami has brought the release of its much-awaited (though possibly disappointing) vampire-slaying game forward from early next year to Boxing Day. Can't say fairer than that…

SINGLES – FLIRT UP YOUR LIFE

IT'S ALL SEX AND THE SIMS-Y

Format:	PC
Origin:	Germany
Publisher:	Koch Media
Developer:	Robotee
Release:	April '04
Genre:	Life Simulation
Players:	1



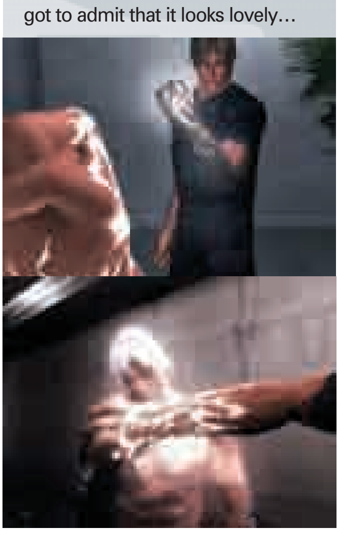
With *The Sims* already proving that watching people's lives unfold is hugely popular, it was only a matter of time before someone tried to sex it up a bit. Such is the case with *Singles*, Koch Media's rather blatant take on the 'life sim' genre. Putting you in control of Linda and Mike (two young adults living in the same apartment), it's up to you to help them satisfy their everyday personal and physical needs. Get it wrong and there'll be trouble, but get it right and… well, you can probably guess where things go from here, especially as the word 'erotic' appears on the press release. And yes, it's got naked flesh – just in case you were wondering.

BREAKDOWN

SCIENCE FICTION, DOUBLE FEATURE

Format:	Xbox
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Namco
Developer:	In-House
Release:	March '04
Genre:	Action/Adventure
Players:	1

Having created something of a stir at X03 (or at least, as much of one as there could be considering how disappointing everything else was), there's little doubt that *Breakdown* could be something special if Namco plays its cards right. The sci-fi thriller storyline – lead character Derrick Cole wakes up in a laboratory with 'super' powers and has to fight his way out past a legion of similarly-powered adversaries – is certainly a good start, but it's the unique first-person perspective that could be the pivotal element. A hand-to-hand combat title with an FPS slant? It could work, although we'll reserve judgement until more finished code arrives. Still, you've got to admit that it looks lovely…



PAYBACK

GTA ON THE GBA? IT'LL NEVER WORK…

Format:	Game Boy Advance
Origin:	UK
Publisher:	TBA
Developer:	Apex Designs
Release:	TBA
Genre:	Action/Adventure
Players:	1-4



Rockstar may have tossed the idea out the window, but that doesn't mean the concept of a *GTA*-style game on the GBA is dead – in fact, *Payback* appears to be doing a damn fine job of it. Despite sticking to a faithful, top-down viewpoint and having the player visit payphones to pick up missions before generally running amok, *Payback* goes one step further by being completely 3D and having some rather impressive physics and ground-breaking graphical techniques to boot. As such, we find ourselves enjoying this one a great deal for a game with no set release date or, for that matter, publisher. Expect to see a lot more about this title in the future…

RICHARD BURNS RALLY

WILL COLIN FINISH IN SECOND PLACE?

Format:	PlayStation2/Xbox/PC
Origin:	Sweden
Publisher:	SCi
Developer:	Warthog
Release:	TBA '04
Genre:	Racing
Players:	1-8

The suggestion of SCi creating a *Colin McRae* beater may have been on the cards for some time now, but it looks as though the fruits of its labour are finally ready for picking. Not surprisingly, the format of the game bears more than a passing resemblance to Codemasters' popular franchise, but SCi is hoping to push the balance in its favour through what's being touted as photo-realistic track re-creations and pure physics. Featuring a total of eight cars and a number of licensed rally courses from around the world (all rendered as closely to the real thing as possible), this could quite possibly be one for rally fans to look out for.





Walking in a winter wonderland… **Rollercoaster Tycoon 2 PC [Atari] 2002**



Across The Border

Barcelona
Hamburg
Paris
Japan

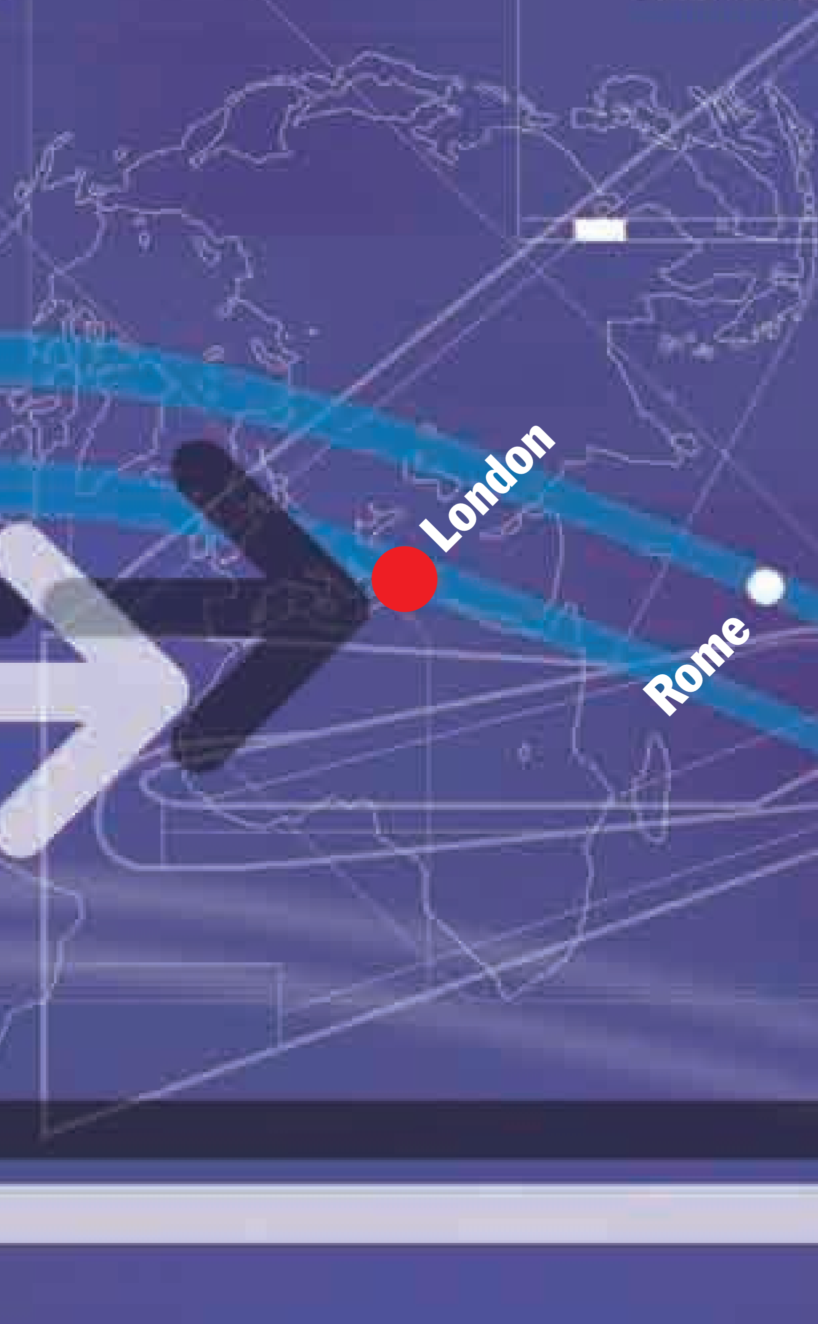
When asked what he remembered about the European games market, Allan Ang's response was hardly unexpected: "Long delays, awful box art, lack of a 60Hz option…". Having left the UK to teach English in Japan, his story as a gamer may be a little different, but his thoughts about the European market are shared by many. Importing has, of course, been around since the industry was born, but with the release of Dreamcast's CD-X and the FreeLoader on the GameCube, the complicated barriers that once surrounded the hobby have come tumbling down. Disk-swapping software has turned the GameCube into the console of choice for first-time importers, and with software such as *Animal Crossing* being discovered, word of mouth has made this trade big business.

Animal Crossing is a good example of why importing exists. The game is undeniably genius; few titles on the Japanese shelves are like it, fewer in America, but in Europe the game is unlikely to see a release. The heavy use of text meant the Japanese release (under the title *Animal Forest +*) went largely unnoticed over here, but when it hit the States, magazines and the internet were buzzing around the sleeper hit of the year. Yet despite countless online petitions, Nintendo currently has no plans to bring *Animal Crossing* to Europe – hence the need for importing. There are clear reasons to get into videogame importing, the most common being a wider selection of software.

Another advantage is the shorter release schedule, but when high-street independent retailers began selling the Japanese versions of *Pokémon Ruby* and *Sapphire* months before their UK release date, Nintendo ▷

Import gaming is still a mystery to many gamers, yet it's now more popular than ever – even though some companies aren't too happy about it





Import gaming is still a mystery to many gamers, yet it's now more popular than ever – even though some companies aren't too happy about it

Across The Border

Import gaming is still a mystery to many gamers, yet it's now more popular than ever – even though some companies aren't



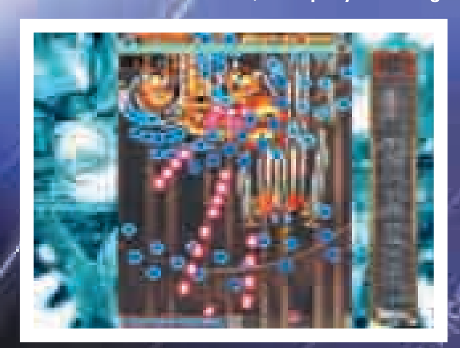
TAIKO NO TATSUJIN [PS2]

Namco's entry into the rhythm action genre effectively saw them take SEGA's *Samba De Amiga* and replace the maracas with a tambourine. Beat the drum in time to music, as simple as that. Utterly infectious (in a good way).



DODONPACHI DAI OU JOU [PS2]

The sequel to the arcade 2D shooter raised the bar when it comes to the sheer amount of bullets on screen. Incredibly difficult, but equally rewarding.



Getting Started

If you've yet to try import gaming, there are a few practical matters to deal with. If you're importing a Japanese or American console you'll need to buy a stepdown adaptor as they run on a different voltage. Make sure your TV is compatible with NTSC 60Hz mode, too – check the manual to see if your TV supports NTSC 3.58 and RGB. GameCube owners might also want to buy some new memory cards. Gaming regions save their games differently on the Cube, and running a Japanese game on a PAL-formatted card will wipe it.

An obvious problem when playing import games is the language barrier. Many story-based games from Japan are nigh-on impossible for the average importer, but many Japanese words, despite the confusing characters, sound exactly the same as their English counterparts. While there is usually some trial and error involved, most text-lite games can be understood.

Import tax can be a hidden expense. If your retailer is based in the UK you may find the initial price higher than elsewhere, but you'll save on postage and import tax. Where possible, ask for your package to be marked as a gift, which will remove most of the risk of import tax. Finally, be sure to read and understand a company's returns policy (particularly if you haven't shopped with it before) as it isn't easy getting a console back to Japan.



▷ Europe (NOE) began acting tough. The company wrote to the retailers, effectively stating that they must remove all imported software and agree to never sell it again, or the European arm of the Kyoto giant would confiscate all Nintendo stock. Naturally, the stores affected aren't happy, but Nintendo claims it's acting in the interests of the whole games industry. "Nintendo rigorously protects its worldwide trademarks and in doing so ensures fair play in the market for all retailers," says Claire Stocks-Wilson, PR assistant at Nintendo UK. "Nintendo will therefore take action against retailers when it becomes aware that they are selling unauthorised imported games in the UK."

But gamers don't see it like that. "I think it's appalling," says Allan Ang, now acting as a full-time exporter of Japanese videogame products. "Nintendo obviously has no wish to understand why people import. In none of the generations have its PAL releases been up to scratch." Even retailers who haven't been targeted by Nintendo are unhappy. Lee Mallabar of UK-based VideoGameImports.com shares the view of many gamers. "It seems Nintendo has really shot itself in the foot," he says. "Retailers feel bitter about this and it will not do Nintendo any favours in the future." It would seem Nintendo has realised that something is wrong and is trying to bring the PAL and NTSC markets closer together. "This is a priority for Nintendo and we have taken steps towards solving this problem," says Stocks-Wilson. "All games that are launched in Europe need to be localised [translated and converted to 50MHz]. Historically we have localised the games from the US version therefore the game has always launched later in Europe. Nintendo of Europe has now employed more people in its localisation department so that it can now localise the game directly from the Japanese version, which means that European games will launch much closer to the US launch date in future." And in a bold move, Nintendo released *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* in Europe before the US.

High Street, High Prices

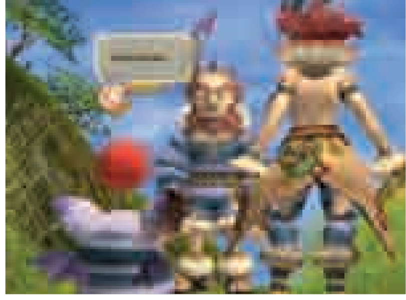
Jon Cronin, marketing and PR manager of UK retailer Computer Exchange (CEX), which was targeted by NOE, is pleased that the situation may be improving. "Gamers who can remember the pitiful PAL conversions of games like *Ridge Racer* and *Wave Race* will be aware of the bad old days of huge black borders and slowdown," he says. "Arcade *Tekken* players found that the early PAL versions were not optimised [and were] approximately 17 per cent slower than the arcade and NTSC versions. Many of these players who wanted to practise at home opted to import a full-speed NTSC version. [But] most publishers have listened to hardcore gamers' needs and, where commercially viable, have improved product quality and shrunk the gap between release dates in different territories." The release of SEGA's Dreamcast saw a sudden improvement in the

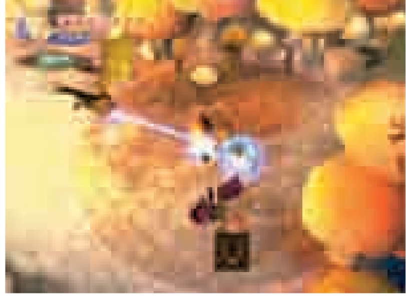
ANIMAL CROSSING [GC]

Not an easy game to appreciate until you play it. The premise is simple – live a pleasant life in your own personal town. Without a fixed goal or defined plot the title may be mistakenly passed over as mundane, but like a fine wine, this is a game to be taken slowly and in small quantities. This unique and unusual game deserves a place in everyone's collection.

INITIAL D: SPECIAL STAGE – [PS2]

A love/hate game, but one that has become incredibly popular in Japanese arcades. *Initial D* sees you take part in a number of one-on-one races around the Japanese mountain roads, earning money and upgrades as you go. Unique handling with superb course design. One for fans of time trials.







quality of PAL releases; most releases had an option for 50Hz or 60Hz and, importantly, some of the big releases for the console were released in Europe first. Thankfully, SEGA's goodwill has rubbed off on the new generation of console manufacturers, and the gaps in release dates seem to be shrinking.

It's obvious that things have improved, but the effect it has had on the popularity of importing is less clear. On the high street, finding the latest Japanese or American releases is tougher than it's ever been, yet the number of online retailers has increased dramatically. In the short term, the Nintendo clampdown has caused the import market on the street to die overnight. In the long term, things don't look promising due to high prices. One of the greatest misconceptions of importing is that it's expensive, and this usually stems from the shocking prices some retailers stick on games. *R-Type Final*, for example, can be found for around £70 on the high street. A ridiculous price, but since the shop wants a slice of the profits, it's understandable. A quick check on the internet finds the same game for a far more respectable £35. Many retailers from all sorts of industries are finding that competing with online stores is impossible, so such differences in prices aren't particularly surprising. Growing consumer awareness of the internet, along with the likes of Nintendo placing a firm hand on the situation, may be the death of the high street importer.

Online, however, things are thriving. Most dedicated importers tend to use the net, and some online retailers find this reassuring. For instance, Lee Mallabar doesn't fear Nintendo approaching VideoGameImports.com. "I can see its side of it, but I doubt it would consider people like us a problem," he says. "The gamers who buy from us are going to buy import games anyway, and most of them have been buying for many years. If ▷

London
Japan
Greece

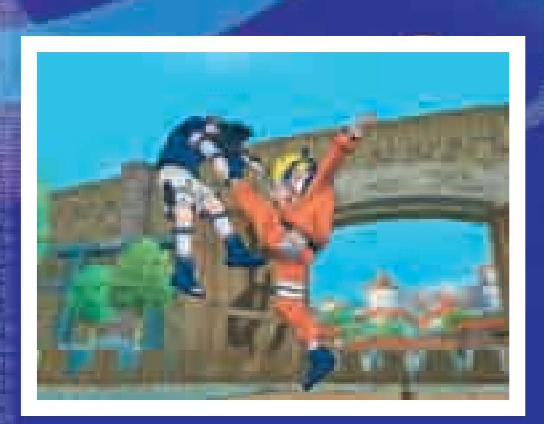


SHUTOKOU BATTLE 01 [PS2]

Imagine hammering along the highway in a thunderstorm, water beading off the windscreen, spray leaping up from a rival car only a few metres ahead. This exciting challenge-based racer sees you fighting off rivals along the highways of Japan. Immense tuning options in the garage round off an extremely deep and enjoyable experience.

NARUTO GEKITOU NINJYATAISEN [GC]

Based around a Japanese animation of a group of ninjas recently graduated from ninja school, *Naruto* is a fairly basic but superbly executed 3D fighter, featuring some of the most stylish graphics around. Extremely shallow compared to the likes of *Virtua Fighter 4*, but sometimes the simple things overshadow the complex.



▷ they don't buy from us, they'll find another way, it's that simple." And it is that simple, because with the latest releases of software or hardware, gamers have shown a surprising level of commitment to make sure they get what they want. Stories of the original PlayStation fetching around £1,000 upon its Japanese release are not exaggerated. And if one store is unable to supply what has been demanded then gamers will look elsewhere – even if it means paying through the nose. Never underestimate the thrill of the new, the knowledge that you're the only person to own the latest console. Indeed, if you had the necessary know-how and finances, wouldn't it be nice to own the PlayStation3 up to a year before your friends? When you've caught the importing bug, it becomes difficult to look back…

A Whole New World

Waiting for the latest hyped release is hard, even harder when you know that others are already enjoying its delights. One thing that keeps importers happy is the Xbox. "In terms of import games, the Xbox has done nothing," says Mallabar. "One reason is that most of the games come out very quickly on PAL, so there isn't enough of a window for the import game to be worthwhile." Xbox's biggest summer game, *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic*, enjoyed a successful debut in America in July, and two months later it had another great launch in Europe. Two months is, surprisingly, one of the longer waits for an Xbox title. Although Microsoft initially stated the Xbox would be free of region locks, when it clearly isn't, nobody can deny the company has done a good job of bringing games to the PAL market quickly, and in a respectable state.

With Microsoft doing a fairly good job of satisfying would-be importers, and Nintendo just frustrating them, it leaves the story of Sony and its all-conquering PlayStation2. If anything, Sony has been the worst offender when it comes to PAL releases, with a number of high-profile titles given terrible conversions. Witness the silky-smooth full-screen Japanese version of *Ridge Racer 5*, and then cringe as you see the ugly black borders of the European release. For people who have never experienced this difference, they are unlikely to know anything is amiss, but once it's been pointed out, it can be hard to ignore.

The highlight of importing comes with the hidden gems, the unexpected and the completely bizarre and it is here where the PS2 excels. Look at the Japanese PS2 market and you'll be amazed at the range of games that are on offer. Titles such as *Onimusha* or *Final Fantasy* will always be popular, but to find the real treats you need to dig a lot deeper. Taito's highly successful series *Densha De Go*, for example (translated as 'let's go by train'), puts you in the driving seat of a Japanese train. Starting off on short, easy routes, you need to work your way up to the faster trains on longer routes. A train simulation may sound dull, but Taito's cleverly designed mechanics award you points for taking corners at the correct speed and keeping commuters happy. A niche experience for sure, but many people have been surprised by their enjoyment of such a simple title. Some may remember the Dreamcast racer *Tokyo Highway Battle*, but they may not know that the series has been phenomenally popular in Japan since the

Rome

Fragil

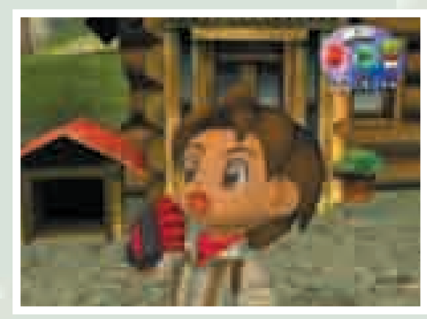




Many UK gamers are frustrated at having to wait several months to enjoy certain titles, but thanks to the internet, getting hold of NTSC games is as easy as buying PAL versions.

Across The Border

Import gaming is still a mystery to many gamers, yet



SNES days, with sales of the most recent edition, *Shutokou Battle 01*, eclipsing the rest of the games chart – including the eagerly awaited *F-Zero GX*. But we're not likely to see it here.

To list even a few of the quality games only available in Japan would fill an entire magazine, but because the games can be so unlike anything in our domestic market, trying to convey the quality of even a handful of them is impossible in such a short space. The internet is full of information for the prospective importer, be it technical advice or Japanese and US videogame reviews. Recommended starting points for advice are ntsc-uk.com and insertcredit.com. Enjoying every gaming format and region is obviously going to be expensive, but it's astonishing to see the amount of games that the public are missing out on by concentrating on the domestic industry.

Things have certainly improved here, and rather than just receive the latest games six months after everyone else, we're now given the games with bonuses, such as making-of DVDs or tweaks to the gameplay. PAL *Ico*, for example, was the best version of the game, with improved AI and greater replay value. Whether or not this is acceptable is down to the individual, but for a handful of gaming enthusiasts, it isn't enough. Nobody wants the PAL market to die just so people can import all day long; quite the opposite, in fact. People just want the latest games released on time, they want the PAL conversions to be of the same high standard as NTSC titles, and they want Europe to be taken seriously as a gaming market. And until that happens, there will always be importing.

Recommended Websites

Check out these tried and tested import websites

Tronixweb.com
American-based with decent prices. Able to get the latest US and Japanese releases quickly.

NCSX.com
Also American-based, NCSX has built up a solid reputation for itself over the many years it has been in business. Has a huge range of modern and retro games from all regions on all formats.

DVDBoxoffice.com
Canadian website that offers the lowest prices around. New releases can be as little as £25, and with free shipping it is virtually unbeatable. Let down by unpredictably slow delivery times.

Play-asia.com
Based in Japan, PlayAsia offers a huge range of Japanese videogame products at a decent rate. Good service with fast delivery times.

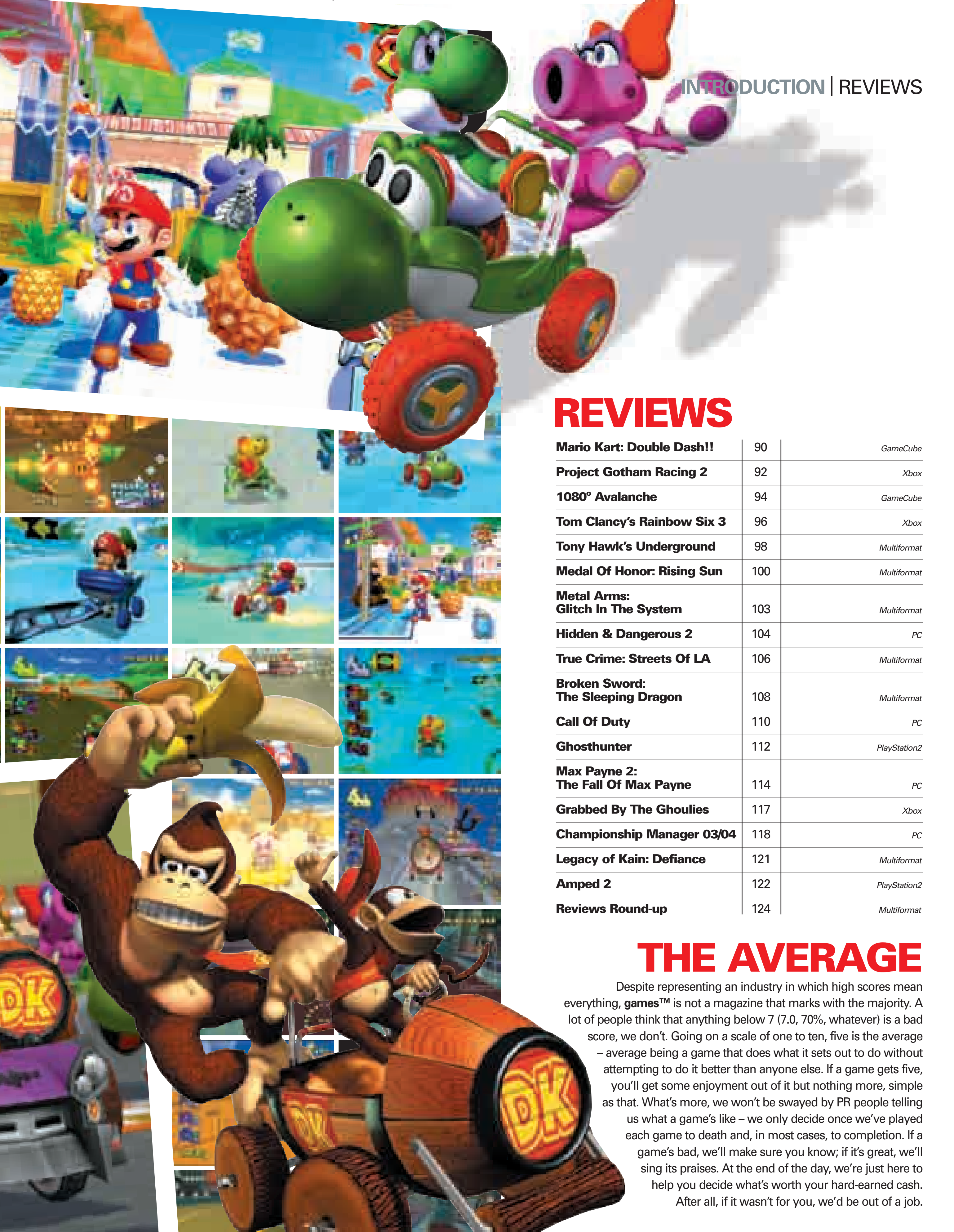
VideoGameImports.com
UK based, offering excellent customer service and delivery times, plus a wide range of new, retro and second-hand games for all consoles and regions, though can be pricey.

GoblinDirect.com
Also UK based, Goblin is one of the biggest European suppliers of imported products. A membership scheme brings prices down considerably, but delivery times can vary depending on stock.

NTSC-UK.com
Nothing for sale, but a website dedicated to import news, reviews and advice. Features a basic introduction to learning Japanese, plus a fairly comprehensive guide to getting started.



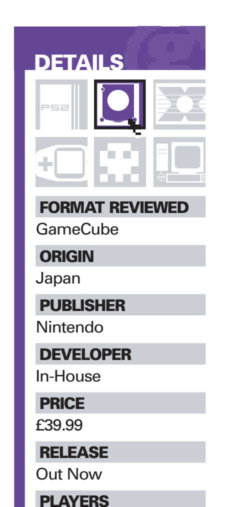
It's certainly bigger, but can *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* do better than *Super Mario Kart*? We take to the tracks to find out if Mario and co. can help to save the GameCube…



REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, **games™** is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score, we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five, you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in most cases, to completion. If a game's bad, we'll make sure you know; if it's great, we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4 (1-8 via LAN)

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

ARE TWO HEADS REALLY BETTER THAN ONE?



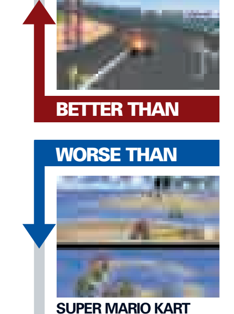


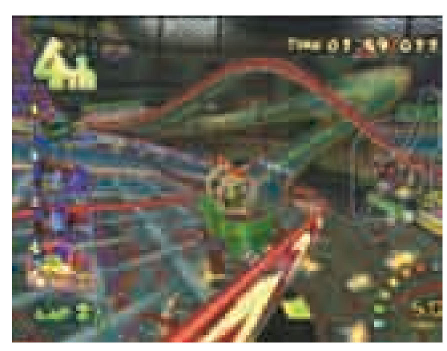
FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
TWO FOR ONE: Two characters per kart makes for a crazy amount of possible combinations.
ONLINE?: Project Warp Pipe could well make *Double Dash's* LAN play go global. Watch this space.

Flick through any magazine, walk into any games shop or talk to anybody in the industry and tell us what you see. This isn't like one of those crazy psychology tests with random ink blobs – the situation is as clear as it is bleak. Nintendo is in trouble. It's going to take continued high-profile support and a strong Christmas for the cheaper-than-ever Cube if this sorry state is to be turned around. If the most hardened critics are to be believed, a miracle might be more in order. The recent advert that depicted a moustache emblem beamed into the night sky, a call for help from Nintendo's guardian hero, is seeming less fictional by the minute. If ever there were a game that carried a burden on its proverbial shoulders, felt the eyes of the world upon it, or that had the power to make or break the future of a century-old company, this is it. No pressure or anything, Mario, but you're needed on the grid…

Three. The unorthodox but cute cloud-riding official begins the countdown, and as the first bead of sweat trickles down the plumber's furrowed brow, he casts his mind back to previous events. The original *Super Mario Kart* remains a firm crowd favourite today, and it's plain to see why. Great course design and structuring backed up by unrivalled simplicity mean that the first in this series of racers is still the defining moment and, in all fairness, is unlikely to be toppled. That said, no game has come closer to rivalling the 11-year-old title than *Double Dash!!*, and for all its complications and new concepts, the handling and (most importantly) the feel are far closer to home than the wayward *Mario Kart 64*.

Two. Snapping back to reality, the man in red is rudely awakened to the fact that it isn't 1992 any more by the startling realisation that someone appears to be hitching a ride. As you can imagine, this does alter the vehicle handling quite drastically depending on the chosen partner (on top of the base vehicle stats this makes for a vast amount of handling combinations) even if the in-race




Some of the courses owe more than a little to the sublime *F-Zero GX*.


Is there a nicer sight than two happy turtles? We didn't think so either.


You'd be grumpy too if your head was spewing forth molten rock…



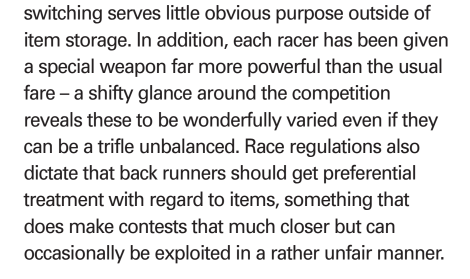
STAND BY YOUR LAN

As you've no doubt read, heard and possibly even tried by now, *Mario Kart* is one of the few games to take Nintendo's first baby steps into the unknown world of online gaming. Admittedly, 'online' is a somewhat generous description of what is basically a glorified system link, but *Double Dash!!*'s multiplayer game is as playable and amusing as anything we've seen. But as wonderfully enjoyable as this mode is, the logistical side of things is something that has been skirted around somewhat. Each player requires a Broadband Adapter (dropped by retailers after *Phantasy Star Online* and now selling on eBay for over £50 until stores decide to restock) as well as the added fun of an Ethernet hub if you want to link more than two GameCubes – it doesn't take a genius to see that this blasts the cost through the roof. Still, you can't put a price on fun. Damn rich people…

switching serves little obvious purpose outside of item storage. In addition, each racer has been given a special weapon far more powerful than the usual fare – a shifty glance around the competition reveals these to be wonderfully varied even if they can be a trifle unbalanced. Race regulations also dictate that back runners should get preferential treatment with regard to items, something that does make contests that much closer but can occasionally be exploited in a rather unfair manner.

One. Ever the consummate professional (except when it comes to plumbing, perhaps), Mario considers the bigger picture rather than just this one race. Sixteen tracks set over four cups with the ultimate test at the end – the hour-long endurance race that is the All Cup Tour, encompassing every circuit in the game in succession. Track designs aren't based on the scribblings of a drunken Goomba either, and save for the odd turkey most of the circuits are of a remarkably high standard. If only the same could be said for the multiplayer modes. The Classic Race and Battle modes are as good as they've ever been, but new additions Shine Thief and Bob-omb Blast really let the side down, with an extraordinary lack of required skill. Mind you, aside from in Time Trial mode, skill is only as valuable a commodity as luck for much of the game.

Go. Eight A-buttons are hit in perfect unison, and as the pack disappears in a cloud of dust we're left with one of the hardest tasks of the year – pinning down all of *Double Dash!!*'s merits and flaws with a single number. In terms of sheer enjoyment, it's tough to think of a game that has made us laugh so much in ages. The mechanics and weapons can leave something to be desired at times, but 'one more go' syndrome is seldom this acute and this is by far the game's biggest strength. The primary-coloured visuals are good though not jaw-dropping, but a smooth ride is offered at every turn, even if accompanied by a jukebox that ranges from pleasantly upbeat to slightly nauseating. Effects lift the package further, with some great quips and yelps for each character. Ultimately, be it single- or multiplayer, this latest karting venture is up there with the best we've seen. Come to think of it, perhaps we just enjoy the irony of newcomer Baby Mario being beaten by his more established predecessor…



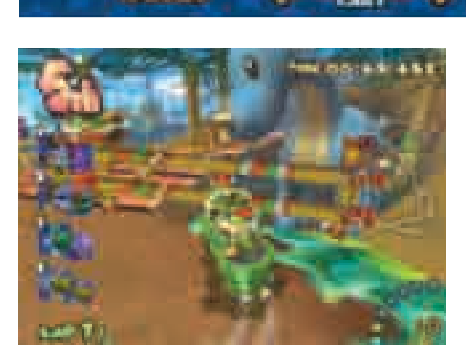
With two characters per kart and a choice of vehicles, there are loads of combinations.

FAQs

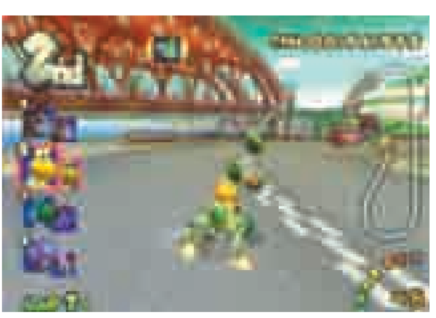
Q. HOW MANY TRACKS?
A total of 16 courses, varying in length from the ten-second blast of Baby Park to the epic Wario Colosseum.

Q. UNLOCKABLES?
Cups, characters, karts, arenas, modes… this is one of the high points of the game.

Q. TOO SLOW?
50cc and 100cc can feel a little plodding on some courses but 150cc is anything but…



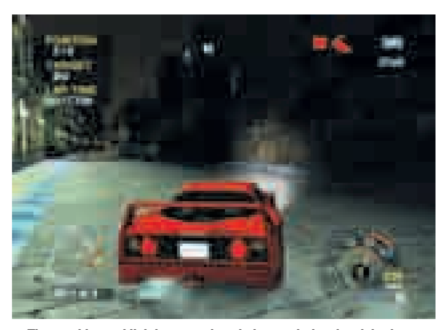
Dig those primary colours. Never let it be said that Nintendo makes cutesy games, eh Dino?



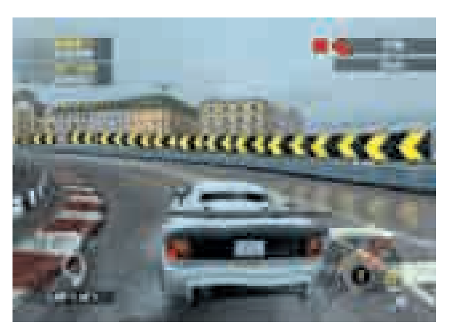
Powersliding is something that takes some mastery, but once you crack it the flames of success will be a common sight.



VERDICT 8/10
AS ENJOYABLE AS ANYTHING YOU'LL PLAY THIS YEAR



The graphics and lighting come into their own during the night-time stages, which are suitably atmospheric.



While damage is visible, those wanting to see car parts falling off will be disappointed to find this is as extreme as it gets.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Bizarre Creations

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out now

PLAYERS
1-4 (1-8 online)

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

NEVER MIND HALO BEATER, HERE'S A GRAN TURISMO BEATER

G*ran Turismo* has had it easy for far too long. The landmark PlayStation series stands head and shoulders above the field as the only realistic racer worth playing. Or it did until *Project Gotham Racing* appeared in its rear-view mirror and revved its engine forebodingly. Bizarre Creations' racer came agonisingly close to greatness a year ago, but now its sequel has had a shiny, Xbox Live-compatible paint job in another attempt to go wheel-to-wheel with the pioneer of realistic driving games.

The bulk of single-player *Project Gotham Racing 2* is found in Kudos mode, expanding on the first game with a series of races split into different categories such as Time Attack, Hot Lap, One-on-one and so on. Artificial intelligence is razor-sharp so rival drivers will block overtaking attempts or even ram you off the road, making for some tense races. This is by far the best AI we've seen in any driving title and it genuinely affects each race, as you have to keep a close eye on your opponents as well as the road. Outside the Kudos mode, there are plenty of other options to consider. Garage is what you'd expect (gawp at your hard-earned vehicles), while the multiplayer option provides some relief away from the car-bumping tactics of the aggressive AI.

The standout mode is the one devoted to challenges. This sees you doing anything from racing your family saloon against sports cars to



Race clear of the pack at the start of the race to give yourself a huge advantage.



The Cones challenge is the pick of an impressive bunch and the Expert variations are dangerously addictive.



Tyre marks show the ideal racing line on each track, although sticking to them isn't always easy…

FAQs

Q. THE XBOX GRAN TURISMO?
Almost. *PGR* is also rooted in realism but isn't too shy to flirt with arcade gameplay.

Q. HOW MANY CARS?
102 ranging from soft-top sports cars to bulky family saloons. There are two bonus cars as well.

Q. ANY DAMAGE?
Cars will bend and buckle yet it looks pedestrian compared to the pile-ups in *Burnout 2*.

Cars will often group together, making it hard to overtake on the narrower sections of the track.



games™ **GLOBAL**

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

GOING LIVE: Log in to Xbox Live and the world's best times are updated even in single-player.

GHOSTBUSTERS: You can download ghosts of the best times and race against them yourself.

negotiating traffic cones in the rain of Edinburgh. Each challenge has five difficulty settings and the learning curve is incredibly well-balanced. Novice setting is a breeze, while Expert challenges prove much tougher, boding well for the game's lifespan. These tasks reveal why *PGR2* is so compelling – it successfully nails the sought-after balance between perfection and human error. There's no-one to blame but yourself for your mistakes, which only encourages you to try again. You always feel in control and the perfectly judged difficulty levels ensure there's something for everyone, no matter how good they are behind the wheel.

The inclusion of Kudos makes the game even more compulsive for those in pursuit of the flawless lap. You're awarded Kudos for techniques such as powersliding or taking good lines through corners, and the constant reward makes it easy to see where you're going wrong and how to adjust your race accordingly. Perfectionists will love working out how to squeeze maximum Kudos from each track, as if the Expert challenges weren't enough of an excuse to return and improve your racing. Kudos is needed to unlock more circuits or cars, which provides an incentive to race properly rather than bounce off rival cars on sharp corners.

Microsoft's racer encroaches on *Gran Turismo*'s parking space, with big-name vehicles included as well as the need to use real-life driving techniques. However, it's *PGR2*'s Kudos meter that separates the two, with *PGR2* more inclined to have fun at the expense of the po-faced stuffiness that occasionally permeates *Gran Turismo*. *Gotham* also includes car damage, although this is restricted to polite metal bending rather than full-on collisions. Still, this is the only visual letdown, and when your eyes are caressed with stunning re-creations of Sydney, Yokohama and other major cities, it seems churlish to moan about such a small detail.

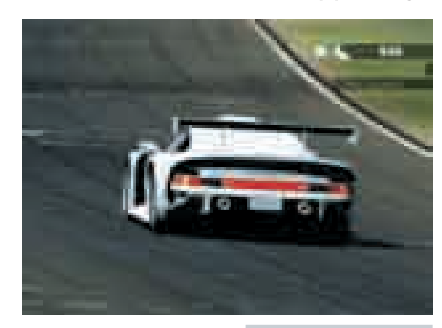
What bumps *PGR2* into the league of truly great racers is the extensive Xbox Live support. The usual online racing options are here, providing long-term multiplayer that most offline games in this genre lack (especially because you can race against opponents matching your skill level). Even better, once you've logged onto Xbox Live, the best times for each track are updated on the fly and you can download ghost cars to practise against offline. It really does feel like you're part of a community full of gamers vying to be the ultimate *Project Gotham* racer. If the Kudos system and challenges fail to grab you, then the Xbox Live modes will – everything here encourages you to become the best racer you possibly can and it's almost impossible to resist the game's lure.

The Xbox Live support rounds off an already impressive package and sees *Project Gotham Racing 2* powerslide to pole position. The Best Racing Game Ever? We certainly think so, and it's up to *Gran Turismo 4* to try and change our minds…

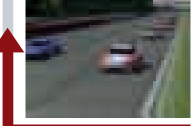


KUDOS TO KUDOS

Drafting, powersliding, two wheels, good lines, jumping, overtaking – all ways to earn Kudos, which is needed if you want to get further in the game or simply feel smug about your racing abilities. The higher the Kudos, the better the racer you are, so it's only natural that the highest single-player Kudos scores are constantly updated on Xbox Live. That way, if you get an excessively high amount of Kudos then you can revel in the fact that *PGR2* players around the world will be sweating to beat your score. But, as will probably be the case, somebody else's high Kudos score will be an extra incentive to keep practising…



GRAN TURISMO 3: A-SPEC

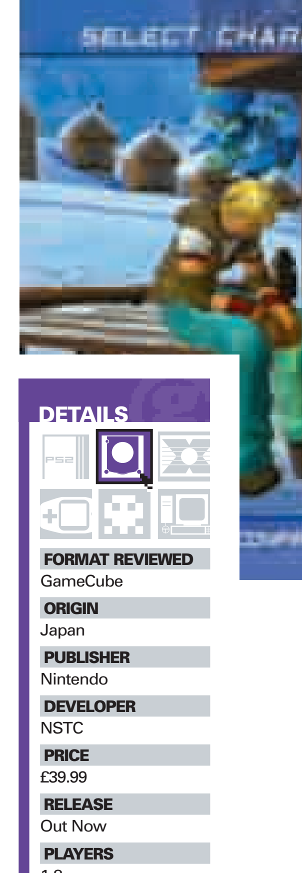


BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE



PROJECT GOTHAM RACING



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
NSTC

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

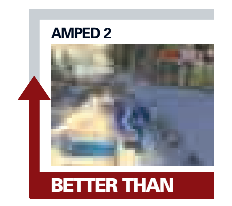
LAN POWER: *1080° Avalanche* allows you to connect two GameCubes together via the Broadband Adapter. Up to eight people can play at once, making for some fairly frantic downhill battles.

■ The Gate Challenge requires slightly more concentration than the normal races, especially if you want those Perfect Zone bonuses.



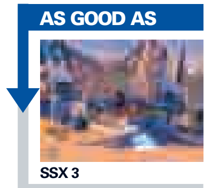
■ Avalanches are particularly frantic, as you'll have to go as fast as possible without making a mistake.

AMPED 2



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



SSX 3

1080° AVALANCHE

NINTENDO PULLS IT OUT THE BAG ONCE MORE

Okay, we'll admit it – having followed the development of *1080° Avalanche* for as long as we can remember, we've been bracing ourselves for severe disappointment for some time. Even as late as this year's ECTS, when the game was shown within the confines of Nintendo's truck-cum-sauna, we had our doubts. With some decidedly clumsy handling and a frame rate that proved shockingly inconsistent, we'd all but written off *Avalanche* as one of Nintendo's rare 'tried hard, could do better' titles. And then we played the finished game.

In a world where as little as six months can change decidedly dodgy code into a polished masterpiece, *Avalanche* is testament to Nintendo's ability to turn things around. That's not to say that the latest addition to the *1080°* series is a masterpiece, of course; those of you expecting an all-out thrill ride along the lines of EA's *SSX 3* will no doubt find plenty to moan about, and the game has its own faults too without taking the competition into account. Much like a lot of Nintendo's titles though, *Avalanche* proves to be a real grower, and rather than prove tiring after a while, it only improves as you delve deeper into what the game has in store.

This could, of course, be down to the fact that much like *1080° Snowboarding*, *Avalanche* initially appears to offer little over its rivals – a paltry five boarders and three tracks await anyone booting up the game for the first time, making for a disappointing start by all accounts. But this is merely intended as a way of breaking you in gently and it's only once you've found your feet on the more forgiving slopes that you'll be granted access to the demanding courses hidden further up the mountain. This, in turn, adds depth to the game's other main modes – Gate Challenge, Trick Attack and Time Trial – which can be played to achieve records and collect currency, which increases the number of boards you can use, which allows you to get better records… It's this chain reaction that hides the game's true depth, particularly when compared to the completely opposite approach taken by *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* which wears much of its content on its sleeve and has few hidden extras.


Some characters are familiar faces from *1080°*. We reckon the Panda Boarder must be unlockable…

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY TRACKS?
There are 21 in total, across four difficulties – Novice, Hard, Expert and Extreme. You'll have to complete all the courses offered by each difficulty before the next one is unlocked.

Q. MUCH FREEDOM?
Many courses have multiple routes, but this isn't trying to be *Tony Hawk*; it's mostly about the racing, so free-roaming isn't really an option.

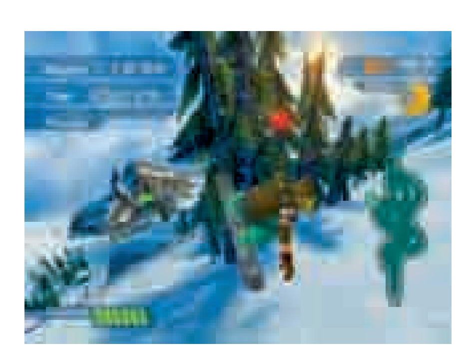
Q. SIMULATION OR ARCADE?
A bit of both. The controls aren't nearly as clunky as those in *Amped 2* (so it's easier to perform tricks) but you won't get any of the gravity-defying action of *SSX 3*.


Fall over and your boarder will get covered in snow depending on how they tumble; a nice touch, if not that important in the long run.

BURIED ALIVE

As the title suggests, *1080° Avalanche* isn't just about snowboarding – there are also key moments where you'll have to forget about competing and race for your life instead. Several courses feature trigger points where the action stops and a real-time cut-scene starts, depicting the beginning of a full-on avalanche right behind you. Once you regain control of your boarder, it's an all-out sprint for the finish in an effort to outrun the torrent of snow behind you. A meter at the top indicates how much danger you're in, while the screen itself shakes like mad to simulate the ferocity of the avalanche. It's an effect that works really well, even if it doesn't happen that often.



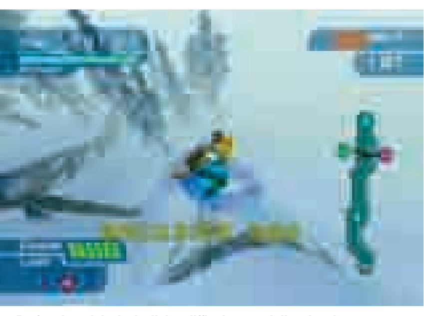


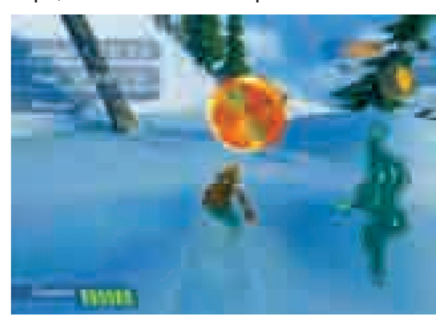
This comparison is also true of the actual gameplay. Whereas *Mario Kart*'s over-reliance on weaponry rather than driving ability remains pretty much constant throughout (which isn't to say it's a bad game), *Avalanche*'s initial simplicity belies the amount of skill you need to do really well. Just racing downhill at top speed (which is all you need to do to unlock some courses) isn't that tough, but it's when you get into the intricacies of performing impressive trick combos, landing huge drops and achieving those more elusive 'perfect' runs that the skill level really kicks in. Having the option to go flat out or have more control over your turning, as well as requiring the player to react to upcoming jumps as they appear rather than just holding the relevant button and releasing it to jump when necessary (à la *SSX*), also adds more skill for people who like their games a little more refined than the average arcade racer. It makes *Avalanche* play substantially differently to the *SSX* games, but without pushing it all the way into simulation territory and making it unapproachable for all but the die-hard fans; exactly what the original game managed, but with far less polish than its GameCube cousin.

Of course, polish is something that *Avalanche* has more than enough of thanks mostly to the well-defined visuals, impressive snow effects, decent level design and a good mixture of licensed music tracks, although Nintendo's failure to eradicate slowdown completely (even if it is in very minor doses) is noticeable to some degree. What's more, we're a little concerned about *Avalanche*'s overall difficulty. While there's certainly depth to be found across the various modes, being able to view the end credits by completing three of the game's four difficulties in less than two hours is somewhat worrying.

With this in mind though, *Avalanche* has still turned out to be something of a pleasant surprise for us, if only because, despite our early expectations, it allows us to retain the rather high ideals of Nintendo that we've come to nurture. It certainly doesn't offer the same experience that *SSX 3*'s genre-leading gameplay does, but because *Avalanche* is just as good for different reasons, it doesn't necessarily have to. It's just a shame that as EA's multiformat offering is no doubt set to dominate the headlines, not as many people will have the opportunity to realise that.


VERDICT 7/10
A LITTLE SHORT, BUT WITH HIDDEN DEPTHS


Performing tricks isn't all that difficult, especially when it comes to spins; that ultimate 1080° isn't as hard to perform as it used to be.


Time Trial stages feature the added bonus of having coin segments to collect; collect them all and you can use the coins to buy new boards.

A POT OF GOLD AT THE END OF EVERY RAINBOW – APPARENTLY

TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX 3



Smoke effects look good and for once they actually have an effect on the vision of the enemy AI.

DETAILS

FORMAT
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

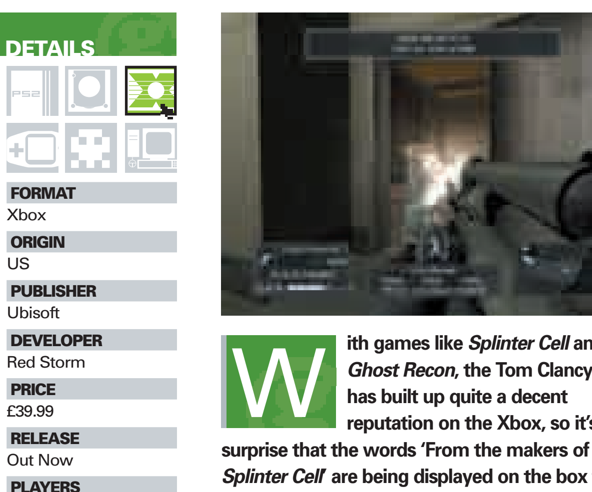
PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

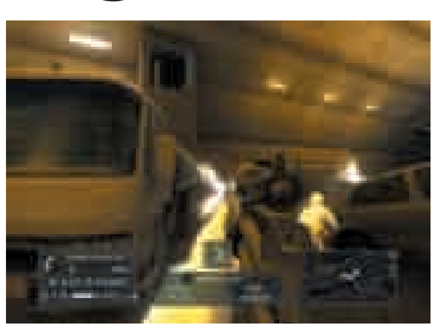
DEVELOPER
Red Storm

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-16



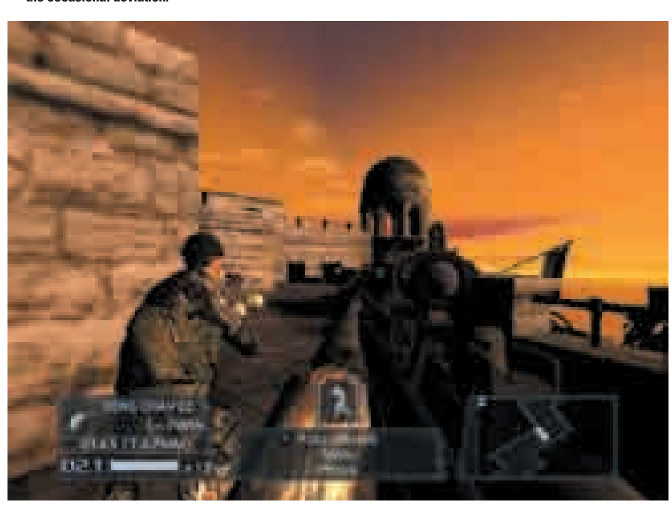


With games like *Splinter Cell* and *Ghost Recon*, the Tom Clancy name has built up quite a decent reputation on the Xbox, so it's no surprise that the words 'From the makers of *Splinter Cell*' are being displayed on the box for *Rainbow Six 3*. Does this mean the game is riding the wave of a Special Forces fad or is there a good reason for you to pull your purse from your pants? Admittedly, the game doesn't appear to be counting on the *Rainbow Six* name to sell, because this is almost unrecognisable from the previous titles in the PC series. We're sure you'll agree that's a good thing if you've been unfortunate enough to come into contact with other *Rainbow Six* console games. This hefty reworking helps cover up the lack of keyboard, mouse and attention span you might have. Gone are the multiple teams, waypoint-littered planning stages and complex controls – this is a fast-action first-person shooter with one team and you as the leader.

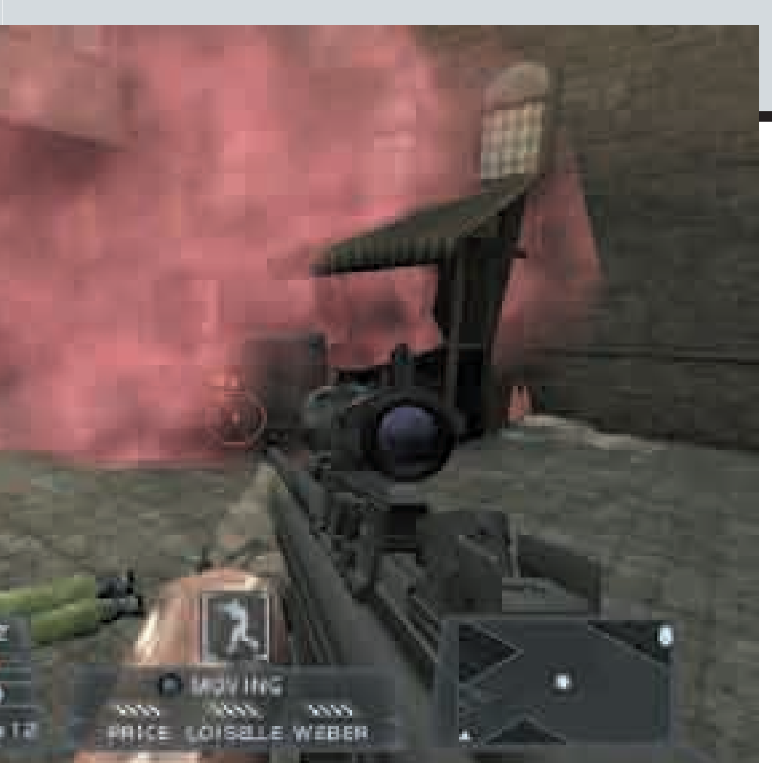
The fact that it's you calling the shots is now an integral part of the gameplay, thanks largely to the use of voice recognition via the Xbox Live Communicator. This is something that has been tried in PS2 titles with varying success, but along with *SWAT* this is the first game on the Xbox to give it a go. For the most part, it's a very successful technique and certainly seems well suited to a Special Forces game. Commands that you can you issue to your team all depend on what you're looking at; for example, if you're looking at a door you might want your team to 'open, flash and clear', 'breach and clear' and so on. Choices are limited but what you have is more than enough to have some good fun. The 'Zulu go' command in particular stands out as it allows you to queue up commands allowing for simultaneous entry into a room; a clever feature that, along with the map in the bottom corner, quickly does away with the need for any kind of pre-mission preparation as has been the case with the PC games.

The majority of the story is set around Venezuela but there is the occasional deviation.

The game makes great use of voice-recognition technology, but not always perfectly.







■ Dynamic room-entry tactics like breaching help to give you valuable seconds once you're inside a building.

WHITE LIGHTNING

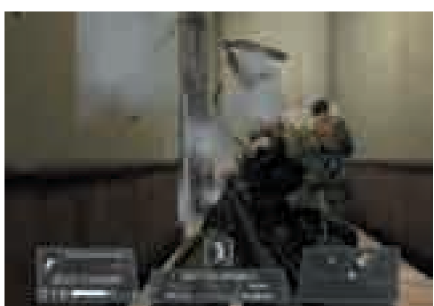
Many games have tried to emulate the disorienting effects of a flashbang grenade detonating, but *Rainbow Six* is the first to offer anything more than a mild nuisance. If you're looking at a flash when it goes off the entire screen turns to white – nothing original here – and then as it slowly fades out, you're left with an after image of whatever you were just looking at, making it difficult to figure out what is real and what is imagined. To complete the disorientation, you also get a ringing white noise in your earpiece that drowns out other sounds.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

HEAD SET GO: Along with *SWAT*, this marks a new era of voice recognition games on Xbox.

COMMUNICATOR BREAKDOWN: But it's clear from both games that more refinement is needed.





■ Tell your men to hold and they take up appropriate pre-set covering positions.

There is, however, one minor problem with the voice recognition, in that it can be a little bit temperamental. You do find yourself having to repeat orders on more than one occasion, something that's not the result of a strong accent or dialect. The 'move' command was a consistent headache when we played the game, which isn't exactly what you want when there's a bunch of trigger-happy terrorists pinning down your team. You can, of course, fall back on button presses but then this kind of defeats the point of having the voice recognition there in the first place.

For the most part, though, it runs smoothly enough and there's that warm tingly sensation when you sweep through a level cleaning it of hostile types, hearing the 'clear' report being shouted through your earpiece. The atmosphere in the game really is fantastic – it plays very much like a stealth shooter (what with the creeping around and superb use of shadow and lighting) but the action is fast and brutal when it does happen. Few other games can force you to go for cover when something goes wrong, but it's something that *Tom Clancy* games do very well – the illusion of reality seems to be paramount and this is no exception, which means a couple of hits generally equals death. That's not to say the game is hard for the sake of it, more that you're forced into a methodical routine for going through the levels. This results in an immersive experience and the AI on both sides helps with that. Terrorists will run at you screaming and shooting wildly when scared, your team will provide cover for one another when moving, and both sides make optimum use of the surroundings.

Along with the headset, this consistent tension offers an experience that you simply will not find with any other squad-based shooters, regardless of format. Sure, there are small problems with the voice recognition, many of the textures in the levels are pointlessly plain, and your team can take an unnecessarily long time setting up on a door on occasion. However, *Rainbow Six 3* is a highly compulsive game to play in single-player and no doubt is sure to give *Counter-Strike* a few things to think about on Xbox Live…

FAQs

Q. IS THE HEADSET REQUIRED?
No, but you don't have to go out of your way to buy one as the gadget comes bundled with the game.

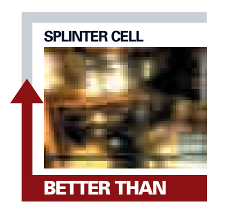
Q. WHAT ABOUT VOICE CALIBRATION?
The game software negates the need for any set-up, so you can start shouting orders within minutes.

Q. CAN I HOLD A CONVERSATION?
Don't be silly – you're restricted to a set list of orders. Try anything else and the team won't obey.

VERDICT 8/10

GREAT GAME THAT HOLDS PROMISE FOR THE FUTURE

SPLINTER CELL

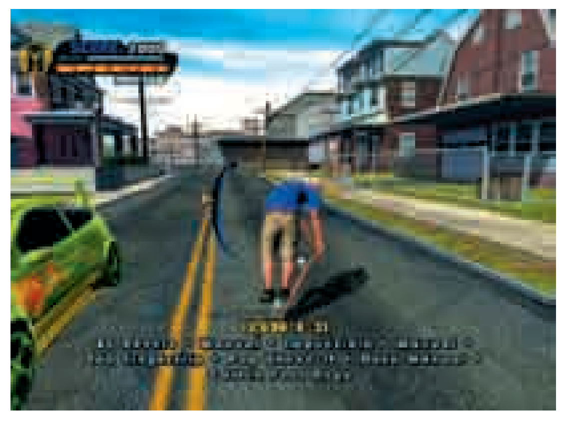


BETTER THAN

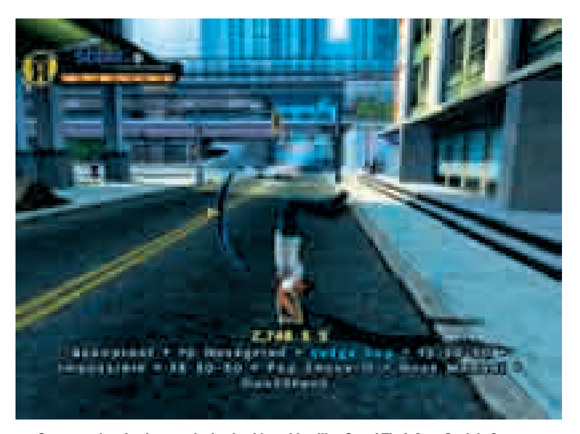
WORSE THAN



HALO



The flatland tricks that spiced up *THPS4* are out in force once more. Sure beats walking…



One more time for those at the back – it's nothing like *Grand Theft Auto*. Capiche?

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND

ANOTHER YEAR, ANOTHER EXTREME OUTING WITH THE RETIRED PRO…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER
PS2, GameCube, GBA

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

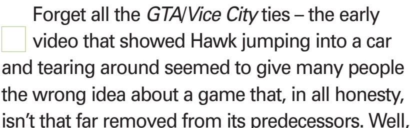
DEVELOPER
Neversoft

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

As much as we love nailing eight-figure combos time and time again, it's growing increasingly hard to be impressed by strings of familiar tricks in new locations. Thankfully, each successive sequel in the *Tony Hawk's* franchise has thrown in a new element – *THPS2* granted us flatland potential, *3* built on this and increased trick potential exponentially with the über-useful Revert before the fourth game built on almost every aspect and gave us bails and spine transfers (two of the finer aspects of *Aggressive Inline*). So what can *THUG* offer?



Forget all the *GTA*/*Vice City* ties – the early video that showed Hawk jumping into a car and tearing around seemed to give many people the wrong idea about a game that, in all honesty, isn't that far removed from its predecessors. Well, aside from the walking around, driving cars and customising just about everything in the game, that is. First up, the off the board sections. Bizarrely, the first task you'll face is done without a board in sight, but for all the introduction and explanation these parts of the game can't be saved from feeling forced solely to provide variety. Using this new freedom of your own accord, on the other hand, is an absolute joy and when you're not being ushered around rooftops in a glorified collect-'em-up, the nigh-on infinite combo potential granted by the new moves is very welcome. Just don't get us started on the driving sections… While not exactly a disaster, they just don't handle anywhere near as well as they should and really are the worst aspect of the game. Nevertheless, these are often quick and painless enough, meaning that your rise to superstardom is never stalled for too long by such enforced variety.

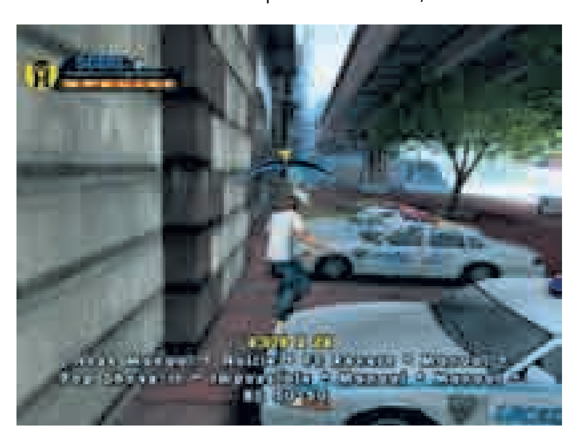
When you've mastered all the goals and tricks on offer, there's nothing to stop you creating your own…

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY LEVELS?
Story mode covers eight huge areas, but let's just say that's not all you'll have to play with…

Q. SECRET SKATERS?
It wouldn't be *Tony Hawk's* without them. We won't reveal identities but rockers and heroes will be pleased with the extra cast.

Q. TOO HARD?
Sick mode is absolutely insane, even for veteran players – time limits and score goals are unbelievably harsh.







Visually, *Underground* pulls exactly the same trick as last year – while superior to many of its competitors, much of the game still seems quite primitive graphically. Functionality is the order of the day and while much of the skating action is sufficiently chunky and solid, using your new-found off-the-board skills can often result in glitching and clipping galore. Much like Shaba's *Wakeboarding Unleashed*, this is purely down to the massively ambitious nature of the task and if it's the price we currently have to pay for such freedom then we'll bite the bullet. Luckily, the ability to use your own custom soundtracks has been reinstated since our brush with the early build of the game, so if you tire of the built-in (and admittedly huge) playlist, you'll be busting out tricks to the Beach Boys, Blur or Biohazard at your leisure.

What impresses us most, though, is the level design. Those who have followed Mr Hawk through his four previous games will have seen the skating environments develop from tiny areas with a few obvious ramps and lines to what we have here – sprawling and fairly believable landscapes that don't feel as though they've been constructed for the sole purpose of skating. Better still, combo potential is greater than ever thanks to the wonderful combination of abilities and obstacles – getting off your board and scaling an otherwise impossible area before continuing your mighty combo is a great feeling and is really what sets *Underground* apart from the rest of the pack. One thing we will say, though, is that it can be quite hard for veteran trickers to pick up the whole 'on foot' thing and those that have been skating since time began (or at least when the first game came out) may well find themselves neglecting the new abilities for a while.

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

MAD SKILLS: Stat points are now earned by performing increasingly difficult tasks in-game.

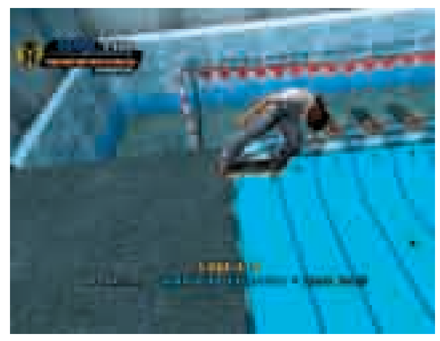
COMBO-NATION With great level design and plenty of tricks, that hundred-trick combo isn't so far away…

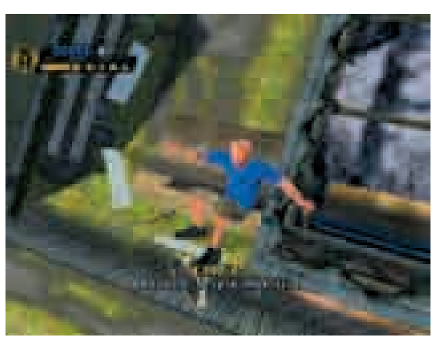
Year on year, the main modes in the *THPS* games have moved further away from traditional over-the-top skating to encompass more and more 'crazy' goals, something we're not entirely sure we approve of. One thing we are sure of, though, is that the core skating engine makes for by far the best extreme sports game of this generation, and used in context the new abilities and freedom only go to confirm this. It's not without its flaws – invisible boundaries and inconsistencies in the freedom do frustrate at times – but *THUG* is so clearly a step, nay, a leap in the right direction that it's tough not to enjoy this year's extreme antics. We can't really see how the series can evolve much further, but we're looking forward to seeing what those clever chaps at Neversoft can get the Birdman doing next. As long as there isn't any driving involved…


VERDICT 8/10
A GENRE-DEFINING TITLE IN SPITE OF ITS PROBLEMS

IT'S ALL BEEN DONE

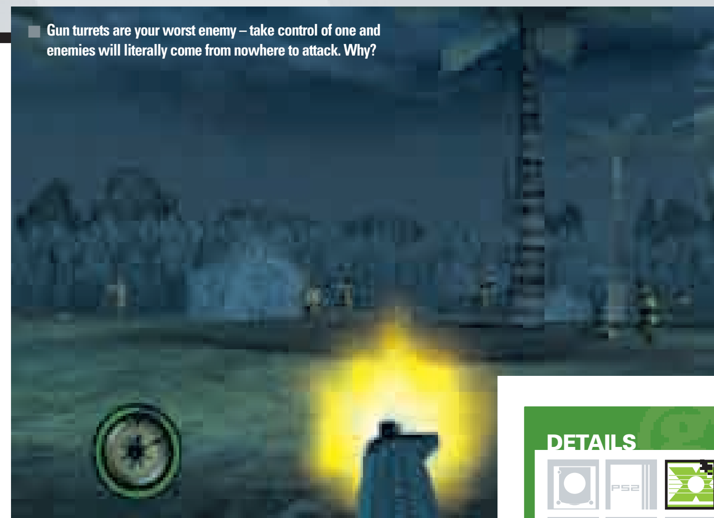
One of the best new features here is the ability to create just about anything – the Story mode revolves around your created skater but once you reach certain points in the game, you can try building parks, inventing tricks and setting your own goals. This brings a great deal of replay potential to the game – particularly useful since only the highest difficulty (the aptly titled 'Sick' mode) will challenge seasoned players. Thankfully, you'll be able to test yourself at will with your own devious goals. Fancy a COMBO collection run around Vancouver? Go for it. A Tricktris session in Moscow? Why not? By setting these tasks for yourself (and others), your professional skating work is never done…

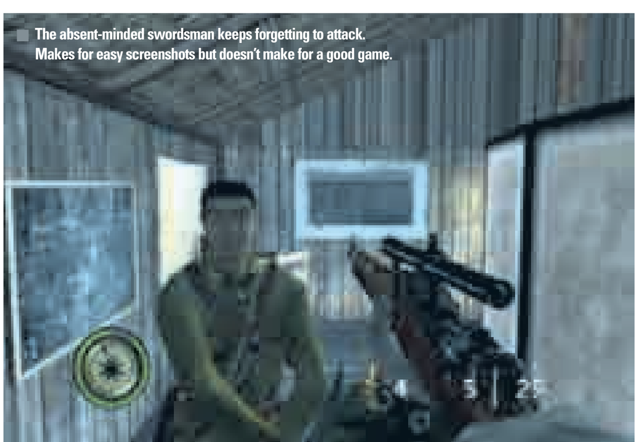

Old school – quite literally. Find the special icons and the retro *Hawks* levels are yours to tear up all over again.

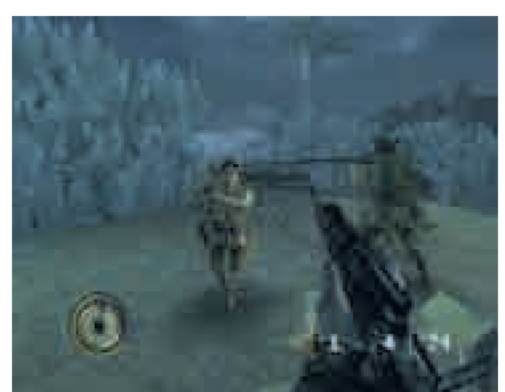

As before, some of the gaps on the checklist are mighty hard to track down. Time to get off the board and go exploring, perhaps.

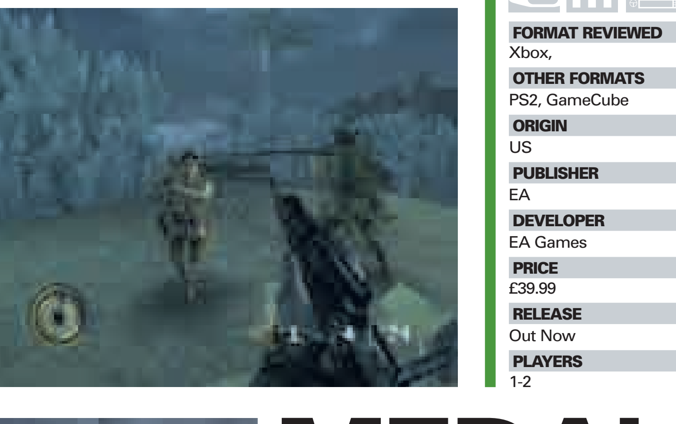



Certain events in the game take place no matter what you do, which proves dull rather than engaging.


Gun turrets are your worst enemy – take control of one and enemies will literally come from nowhere to attack. Why?


The absent-minded swordsman keeps forgetting to attack. Makes for easy screenshots but doesn't make for a good game.




Rising Sun opens with events that should be chaotic and frantic, but they can't match *Frontline*'s visceral introduction.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox,

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, GameCube

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
EA

DEVELOPER
EA Games

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

MEDAL

FAQs

Q. BASED ON REALITY?
Yup, *Rising Sun* shows the events surrounding the 1941 Pearl Harbour attack from an American perspective

Q. THE 'EVENTS'?
Well… the original air raid is in there but some liberties appear to have been taken concerning subsequent proceedings

Q. SO, REALISTIC THEN?
Apart from soldiers wearing jungle camouflage indoors, the weapons and settings live up to the game's inspiration

Having paid close attention to the praise heaped onto this game's predecessor for opening with a remarkable *Saving Private Ryan* imitation, *Rising Sun* also begins with chaos and confusion. You wake on board USS Arizona in 1941 to the sound of explosions, only to discover your ship is under attack from the Japanese. After a cumbersome tutorial in the depths of the vessel, you eventually stumble onto top deck to defend the ship using the onboard machine guns. Problem is, fending off attacks is simply a case of holding down the fire button and guiding the target over incoming fighters, which leaves the faux Pearl Harbour sequence rather flat.

And that sets the tone for the rest of the game – you're guided from one forced, pre-scripted event to the next while being bombarded with an aesthetic tour de force that should suck you into the war but leaves you feeling cold. Too much conspires against the illusion of actually being in Pearl Harbour, with *Rising Sun* coming up short in almost every department. Visually the series appears to have been locked away in a cupboard since *Frontline*, with EA only unearthing the key to sprinkle *Rising Sun* with an oriental theme. It's hard to believe these drab textures and lifeless levels are on the same console that hosts *Halo* and *Splinter Cell* but here they are, confusing the hell out of you as you try to work out whether you've visited the same area before or not (wait until you reach the jungle levels). Likewise, distinguishing between enemies and your own team isn't easy. Fortunately, you don't injure allies when you shoot them but it's still a frustrating waste of ammo.

Regardless of the reluctance to flex the Xbox's graphical muscles, this would have been pardonable had the game solved the series' long-standing problem of linearity. Multiple routes through the levels should have eradicated this yet it feels as though you're merely ticking off set-pieces until reaching the war's conclusion. The level design is basic at best with the decision to hide save points being total madness. Couple this with a sharp increase in on-rail shooting sections and it's hard to disagree that EA is dragging you through *Rising Sun* its way or else. Part of the problem is that you're continuously hurtled down one route with little room for exploration ('This door can't be opened' is a message you'll learn to hate), yet the real flaw lies with the over-familiarity of *Rising Sun* that fails to convince you that you're playing something fresh, new and exciting. Geographical settings aside, there are very few differences between this and *Frontline*, and that hit the shelves over a year ago.

If there's anything that shows how out of touch the *Medal Of Honor* series is becoming, it's the artificial intelligence. The soldiers you'll encounter are quite simply the stupidest specimens to ever man arms. A few examples of the AI ('artificial idiocy' in this case) that we witnessed include a swordsman who attacked us before forgetting what he was doing, guards that couldn't make their minds up between charging and shooting, and soldiers that refused to act even when they saw the whites of our eyes. It continues in this vein throughout, and the drama of a tense stand-off is drained away when the 'fearsome' Japanese soldiers stop trading gunfire to embark on another Benny Hill routine.

Damage limitation comes in form of the music, with the orchestral score head and shoulders above other soundtracks in the genre. The effect is dampened somewhat when dramatic violins give way to a Japanese soldier who harmlessly stumbles back and forth à la Charlie Chaplin, but at least the music manages to set the mood where the graphics and artificial intelligence fail. If there was some way to play this blindfolded, maybe there would be a happy medium for everybody. It's also pleasing to see EA has gone the extra mile with multiplayer modes and options. Two-player co-op goes some way towards salvaging *Rising Sun*, and although this mode won't eradicate the woeful AI or add fresh gameplay, it's certainly more enjoyable when fighting alongside a friend.

We were disappointed when *Frontline* failed to take advantage of its World War II settings, but it's galling to see that EA still hasn't got it right with *Rising Sun*. If there's ever a case against World War III, then surely this is it.

OF HONOR: RISING SUN

WAR! HUH! WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR? APPARENTLY NOT VIDEOGAMES

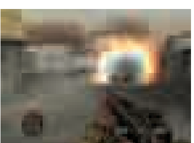
VERDICT 4/10

DISAPPOINTING ISN'T THE WORD; IT'S DEPRESSING

UNLEASH HELL

EA's failure to convince gamers they're fighting a real war is disappointing, but the lack of realism concerning mounted machine guns borders on the comical. Get behind a gun turret and soldiers will literally come out of nowhere to attack, even if you've cleared the area and double-checked for any threats. We tested our theory on every gun turret we found and, true to form, soldiers seemed to crawl of out of the woodwork every time we opened fire. If anything, this is a step backwards from *Frontline* where the guns had some genuine use – here, they seem little more than an excuse to cause pointless mayhem.

GAMECUBE £39.99 OUT NOW



In our eyes this looks the best out of the three. Sadly, the Gamecube version doesn't make similar advances in gameplay and suffers the same problems as the Xbox game.

PS2 £39.99 OUT NOW



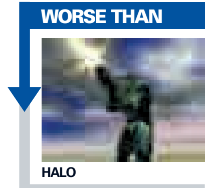
Graphically, this isn't worlds apart from the Xbox version (they're almost as bad as each other), though the joypad is easier than the Xbox pad for reloading and ducking.

MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE



BETTER THAN

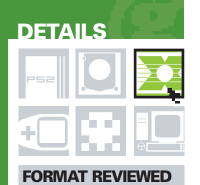
WORSE THAN



HALO


eMag

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, GameCube

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Vivendi

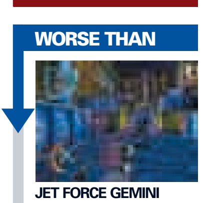
DEVELOPER
Swingin' Ape Studios

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

RATCHET & CLANK



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

JET FORCE GEMINI

HOW CAN SO MANY CLICHÉS MAKE SUCH A GOOD GAME?

METAL ARMS: GLITCH IN THE SYSTEM

When the hyped adventures of Vivendi's *Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter* failed to impress us, we weren't quite sure what to expect from such a low-key title as *Metal Arms: Glitch In The System*. As it stands, it seems that Vivendi may have backed the wrong horse. While both titles are equally guilty of stealing ideas from other games (in this case, *Ratchet & Clank*, *Paradroid* and *Jet Force Gemini* to name a few) the difference is all in the execution. While Warthog's *Mace Griffin* ended up feeling like yet another tired first-person shooter, here's a game bursting with energy and a strong sense of humour.

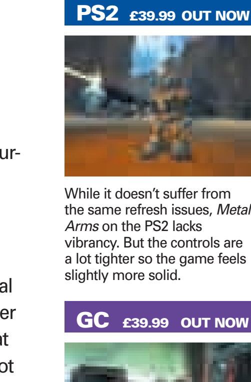
Using a third-person perspective, *Metal Arms* places you in the metallic shell of Glitch, a wisecracking droid on a dangerous mission. After making your way through an enjoyable tutorial (and not one that seems to take up the best part of an hour) you'll quickly become impressed by *Metal Arms*' tight controls and engaging gameplay. Being a versatile fellow, Glitch is able to commandeer various vehicles as well use an array of powerful weapons to take on his robotic opponents and even hack into them and take over their bodies. All this action takes place within some gorgeously detailed environments that are as stylish as they are expansive (think *Jet Force Gemini*, only in hi-res). Indeed, visuals throughout are incredibly sharp and perfectly complement the frantic and varied gameplay – it's just a shame that the Xbox version suffers from some appalling refresh issues.

Even with this irritating, though superfluous, problem, *Metal Arms* contains more than enough engaging characters and well-designed levels to make it stand out in a sea of pre-Christmas titles. Add to this a selection of memorable set pieces, plenty of destructible scenery (that actually has a use), and a frantic four-player mode and the game's cult status seems assured. Despite being filled with all manner of videogame clichés, *Metal Arms* somehow feels refreshingly new and not at all like the cobbled together title that it so undoubtedly is. It's unusual for a game to hide this fact so well and still deliver the goods, even stranger when you consider that this is Swingin' Ape Studios' first title. It might not have the well-known licence behind it that so many gamers seem to crave, but anyone who finds this nestling under their Christmas tree won't be disappointed.



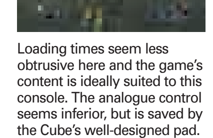
VERDICT 7/10
HIGHLY ENTERTAINING AND, ABOVE ALL, FUN

PS2 £39.99 OUT NOW



While it doesn't suffer from the same refresh issues, *Metal Arms* on the PS2 lacks vibrancy. But the controls are a lot tighter so the game feels slightly more solid.

GC £39.99 OUT NOW



Loading times seem less obtrusive here and the game's content is ideally suited to this console. The analogue control seems inferior, but is saved by the Cube's well-designed pad.

games™ FINGERPRINT

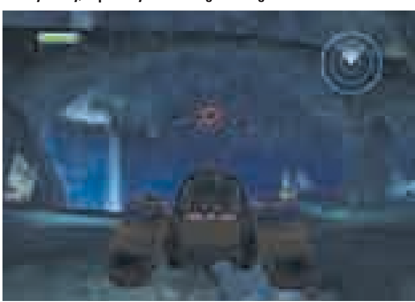
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

CALL TO ARMS: Unlike in *Halo*, Glitch can assign limited commands to the many droids he liberates
FOUR-PLAY: Four-player mode sidesteps the faults inherent in other multiplayer third-person shooters.

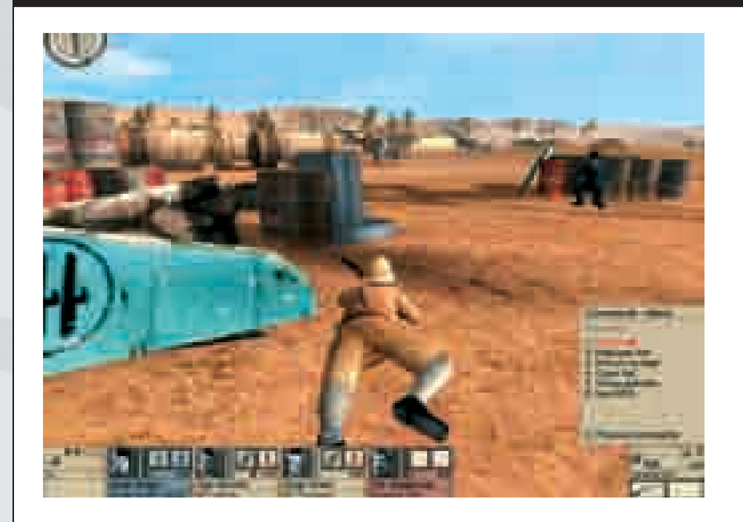




Glitch is able to control all manner of enemy droids on his travels – very handy, especially for clearing out dangerous areas.



Glitch has access to a variety of vehicles to help him traverse the massive landscapes. And some of them look very familiar…





ILLUSION PROVES A JACK OF ALL TRADES IS BY NO MEANS DOOMED TO BE A MASTER OF NONE

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Czech Republic

PUBLISHER
Gathering

DEVELOPER
Illusion Softworks

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (Up to 32 online)

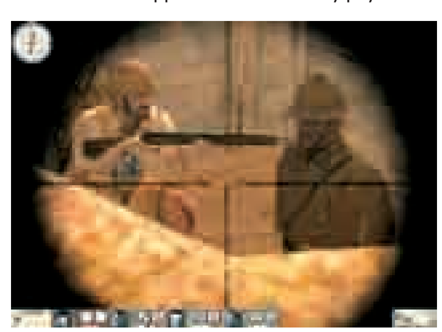
MINIMUM SPEC
1GHz processor, 128Mb RAM, 2.4Gb HDD space, 32Mb 3D graphics card

Any hopes of *Half-Life 2* and *Deus Ex: Invisible War* making it into our stockings this yuletide may have been scuppered, but just as PC gamers had begun to write off Christmas, Illusion Softworks goes and serves up one of the year's finest titles in the form of the relatively under-hyped *Hidden & Dangerous 2*. From the outset it's easy to see why the game has taken four long years to create. Virtually unrecognisable from its predecessor, *H&D2* is a truly epic affair that showcases some of the most rigorous attention to detail we've ever seen.

But before jumping into this incredibly authentic WWII theatre of conflict, players must put together a team of four elite SAS operatives from a pool of 30 and kit them out with everything they'll need for the mission ahead. A selection of equipment can be recommended by the computer for those eager to get straight down to business but, as with the rest of the game, a more patient and considered approach will ultimately pay off – particularly when you find your squad stuck out in the field for several missions at a time with no access to replenishments in between.

Everything about *H&D2* has been made as scrupulously true to life as possible, but beginners should be warned that total realism is a harsh set of rules. As soon as you realise that a single shot can kill, the less likely you'll be to put your vastly outgunned squad up against the frighteningly perceptive AI legions without first orchestrating a plan to rig the playing field in your favour. It's also handy to remember that firing an un-silenced weapon will ring out for several hundred metres (the precise distance registers on the offending soldier's stealth gauge, which provides a constant check on how far their visual and audio cover extends), and all enemies alerted will stop at nothing until its source is found.

Thankfully, *H&D2* furnishes players with all the tools they could ever wish for to compose clinically co-ordinated surprise attacks on enemy



Once you've got an enemy to surrender their uniform, make sure you ditch all your allied weapons and equipment to complete the disguise.



The tactical map is superb for giving your chaps the positional upper hand in combat to counteract the enemy's numerical advantage.

FAQs

Q. ALL AROUND THE WORLD?
The epic missions are staged on huge maps in locations ranging from an arctic iceberg to scorching desert, and lush jungle to city streets.

Q. PLAY IT AGAIN?
As well as replaying each mission with a different strategy, you can try your luck with one character in Lone Wolf mode, or switch stealth for butchery in Carnage mode.

Q. MULTIPLAYER?
The impressive combat dynamics make for great deathmatch, occupation and objective-driven online skirmishes.

MASTERS OF DISGUISE

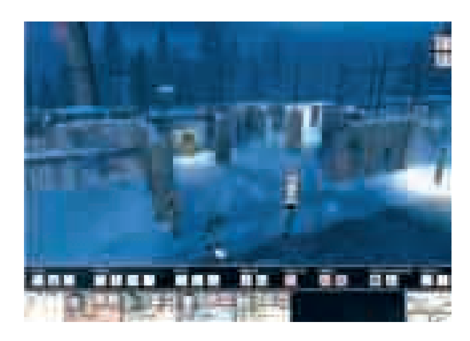
You can't devise an ambush around enemy positions your squad can't see, so one of the most useful tactics is to send out a scout to survey the area before making your move. The safest way for an operative to move around undetected is to procure a disguise, which will provide some cover if you're seen from a distance. Since the bloodstained uniforms of dead enemies are useless against the realistic AI, the only way to get clean kit is to make your target surrender. This is incredibly difficult, and the suggested tactics of scaring foes into submission or shooting a weapon from their hands are far from foolproof.

FUSED

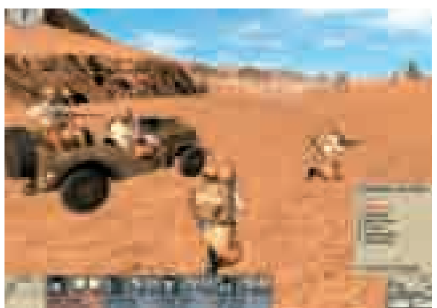
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

CHESSMASTER: Meticulously orchestrate your troops from above using the tactical map interface.

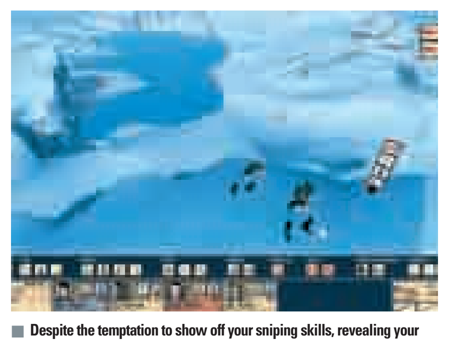
SHARPSHOOTER: Practice marksmanship from the more traditional third-/first-person viewpoint.







Thanks to a souped-up version of the LS3D engine used in *Mafia*, even the vehicles in the game handle remarkably well.



Despite the temptation to show off your sniping skills, revealing your position will bring a legion of highly trained guards down on your head.

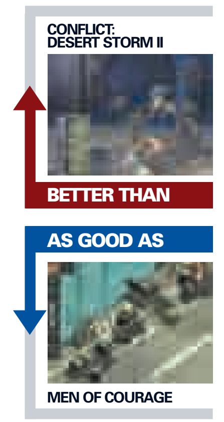


For the Lone Wolf missions you'll be stripped of your tactical map and squad commands, turning the game into a good old stealth-'em-up

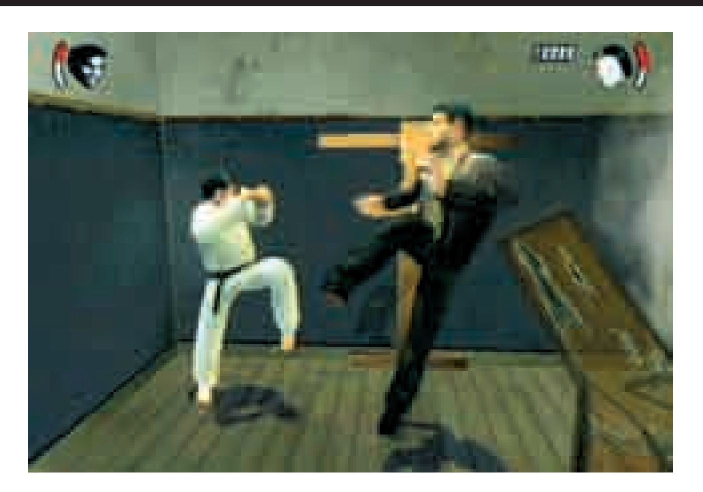
positions whilst retaining complete control over each soldier's actions. The most intricate interface is the superb tactical map, which allows players to freeze time at any crucial moment and pan the camera to assess the situation from every angle. Each squad member can then be set a series of precise waypoints and given detailed instructions as to how they should behave en route and upon reaching these positions. Time can then be set running and frozen again at your leisure should your plans require any refinement. The game's squad-based sections could theoretically be played out entirely from this viewpoint, but most players will want to get into the action themselves…

You can step into the boots of any squad member from either a third- or first-person perspective, and the complex set of verbal commands and hand signals at their disposal once again ensures the activities of your whole squad remain tightly controlled. The Num keys give instant access to a detailed list of orders that can be issued to any soldier within earshot (or line of sight for hand signals), and tapping out codes like 0-2-3 (whole team – attack – fire on my lead) becomes instinctive in no time. The battlefield action itself is as polished and compulsive as in any leading FPS title, with the 40 authentic weapons targeting fluidly and sounding fantastic.

Any combination of playing styles can be employed to get the job done, yet certain missions might strongly encourage using the whole team to perform silent ambushes while others are more suited to allowing a lone sniper to wreak havoc. More enforced variation comes in the shape of vehicle-based sections and missions involving a single operative, but those expecting a lapse in excellence from these secondary elements can think again. The game's only letdown comes from the very occasional glitch whose presence is sadly amplified by the precise nature of play, but these minor flaws have to be put into perspective against the sheer quality and quantity on offer that makes *H&D2* stand out from everything else in its class.









games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

WEST COAST FLAVA: Snoop Dogg, Warren G and Coolio all appear on the gangsta rap soundtrack.

CARRY ON...: No more repeating those tricky missions, just accept failure and continue the story.

TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF LA

THE NEW CRIME LORD IN TOWN OR JUST ANOTHER PETTY THIEF?

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, GameCube

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Luxoflux

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

How would you go about making a game to end all games? Well, how about using one of the undisputed greats – say, *GTA: Vice City* – as a starting point, improving on the winning formula in every area you can think of, and finally mixing in a few exciting ideas of your own? A failsafe plan if there ever was one. Yet while *True Crime* has enticed us for months with its theoretical *GTA*-beating potential, the end product has somehow fallen a long way short of such grand aspirations.

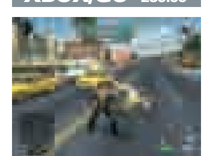
All the pieces appeared to be in place for Activision's crime epic to be lapped up by legions of *GTA* fans thirsty for another wanton feast of city-roaming violence. Among the star-studded cast lending their voices to the cause are screen legends Gary Oldman, Christopher Walken and Michael Madsen – one nil to Activision. Notching up a second mark for the *True Crime* camp is the mammoth 240 square miles of LA streets that have been faithfully recreated to host the action. And rounding off the selling points is a multi-branching storyline that sends players on a different path depending on whether they pass or fail each mission.

Players take the role of rule-bending cop Nick Kang and although the action is largely mission-based, several 'cruising' levels allow you to freely explore the sights of LA while attending to randomly generated crimes at your leisure. The rewards for making these unscheduled busts – and generally behaving responsibly by subduing targets rather than brutally gunning them down – are Shield points, which can be cashed in for health, car repairs and the opportunity to acquire new skills at the many dojos, driving courses and shooting ranges dotted around the city.

Yet for all its potential, to describe the delivery of each element as 'average' verges on flattery. Gameplay in the fist-fighting, shooting and driving sections never threatens to inspire, feeling haphazardly patched together rather than part of a cohesive unit. It's a shame, as we were expecting much more. Whoever came up with the inventive level structuring or spent months mapping LA has every reason to be furious with the lacklustre implementation of their ideas.

VERDICT 4/10
HALF THE GAME IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN

XBOX/GC £39.99



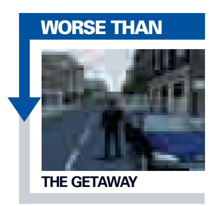
Now that *Vice City* is available on the Xbox, there may be few takers for *True Crime*'s half-baked alternative. But in the absence of a *GTA* title on the Cube, this isn't the worst game for filling the void.

STARSKY AND HUTCH

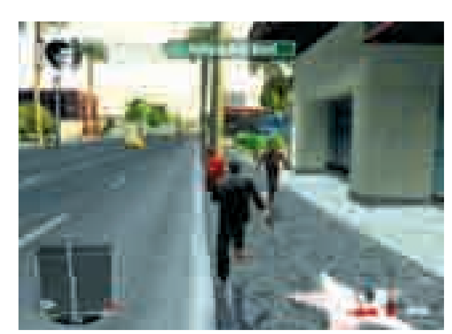


BETTER THAN

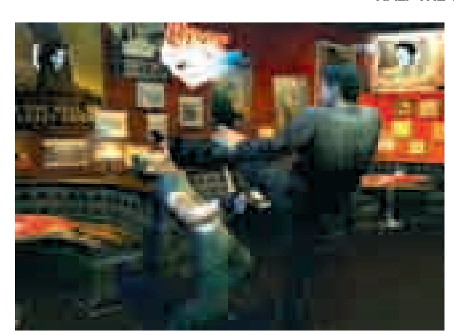
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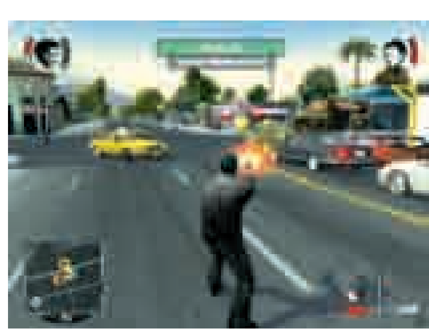
THE GETAWAY



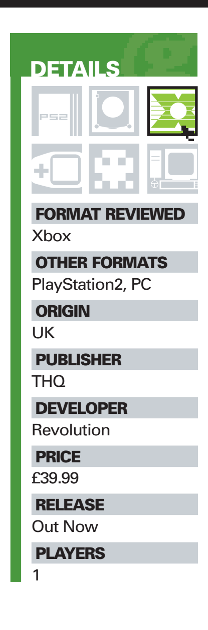
The sheer scale of the LA map dwarfs *The Getaway*'s London, but the character and quality just aren't quite there.



While new hand-to-hand combat moves can be learnt in the dojo, the beat-'em-up action is a particularly shallow element of play.



Go on a *Vice City*-style killing spree and you'll eventually have a SWAT team called in to put an end to your madness.



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
THQ

DEVELOPER
Revolution

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

A SOUPED-UP SHADOW OF THE TEMPLARS? OR SHADOW OF ITS FORMER SELF?

BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON

The last time we had the pleasure of accompanying George Stobbart and Nico Collard on their globetrotting adventures was just over six years ago, as the heyday of the point-'n'-click puzzler was drawing to a close. Yet despite claims the genre has long since run its course, Revolution is determined to prove a series of such pedigree has just as much place in today's gaming climate. Cue a complete 3D makeover that not only allows for a much more cinematic spectacle to be created, but has also prompted the developers to bring several new action-based elements into play.

Using the same concept introduced by LucasArts' masterpiece *Grim Fandango*, characters are moved around the game world with the D-pad and may interact with any objects that catch their eye. The actions available to you are then depicted on a handy controller map, and can be performed simply by pressing the corresponding button on your pad. Aside from the traditional 'look at', 'pick up' or 'use' commands, navigating the new 3D environments will require a more adventurous set of acrobatic actions. Reaching the end of a ledge, for instance, will activate a jump icon, which players are invited to press and sit back while George or Nico carry out the pre-programmed leap themselves. As you might imagine, this adds very little to the playing experience and sadly typifies an ongoing lack of involvement as the unravelling story sweeps you along.

Many of the puzzles are somewhat straightforward in design, and while ensuring players are less likely to hit those infuriating brick walls typically found in the genre's great titles, your input into proceedings once again tends to feel slightly shallow and less rewarding than before. Similarly, conversational 'puzzles' generally tend to be solved by exhausting every topic available, although the dialogue is occasionally so long-winded and uninspiring that it becomes a chore to trawl through.

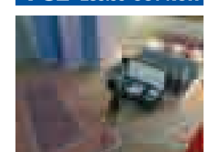
That's not to say the customarily intriguing plot isn't a joy to be part of, with its conspiracy theories and use of real-life historical artefacts, but fans who've been waiting six years for this are likely to be disappointed that *The Sleeping Dragon* struggles to recreate the series' former glory, let alone expand upon it.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
ANOTHER DIMENSION: The new 3D perspective encourages you to get more involved in the story.
HANDS ON: George and Nico get more involved in the action, and tackle several box-shunting puzzles.



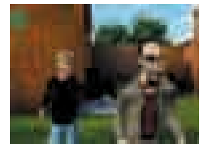
ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK

PS2 £39.99 OUT NOW



While the visuals have obviously been toned down slightly for the PS2 to handle, the steady nature of play ensures these compromises are barely distinguishable. The intuitive control system is virtually identical to the Xbox.

PC £29.99 OUT NOW

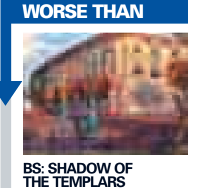


Broken Sword returns to its spiritual home on the PC and unsurprisingly looks noticeably better than its console brethren, yet in the absence of the traditional point-'n'-click interface it no longer holds the upper hand in the control department.



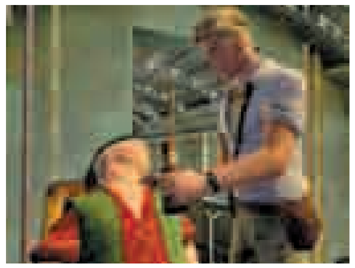
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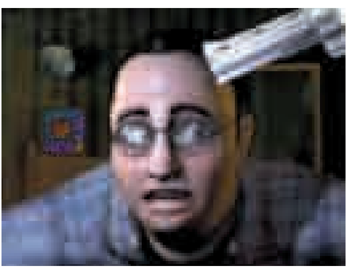




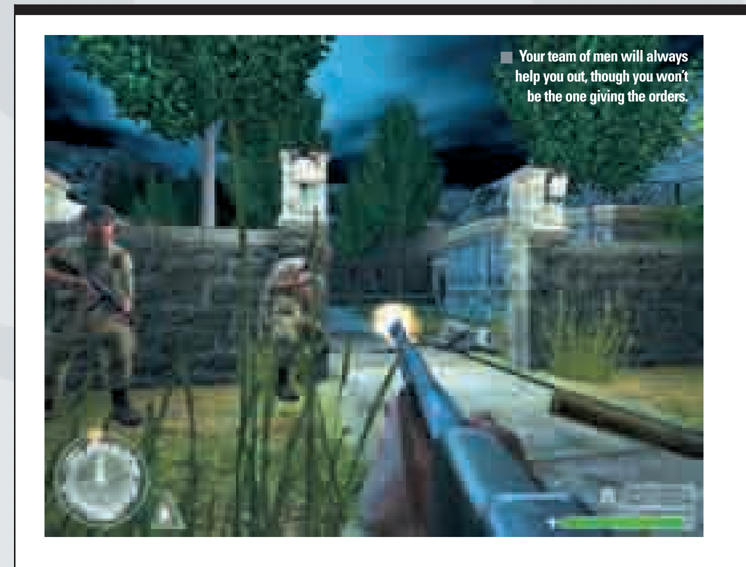
Fans of the series can expect to see George and Nico setting out to foil the evil plans of the sinister Neo-Templars once again. Let's hope for Nico's sake that potplants can withstand semi-automatic weaponry…



Many of the puzzles in this outing fail to recapture the magic of previous games.



There are plenty of cinematic moments and lots of dialogue, with player involvement taking a back seat.


Your team of men will always help you out, though you won't be the one giving the orders.


Your squad-mates operate as a tactical unit and ensure enemy confrontations erupt into intense battles.

CALL OF DUTY

WOULD THE REAL MEDAL OF HONOR PLEASE STAND UP…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Infinity Ward

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (Up to 16 Online)

MINIMUM SPEC
700MHz processor, 128Mb RAM, 1.4Gb HDD space, 32Mb 3D graphics card

As the conveyor belt of WWII-themed shooters churns out *Medal Of Honor* clones at an alarming rate, attempts to replicate the gripping cinematic ambience of EA's benchmark title have so far fallen some way short of the mark. And almost two years since we were first left awestruck by such spectacles as the now legendary Omaha Beach level, the horribly basic AI and infamous linearity have taken a rather heavy toll on a once revered gaming experience. But while the latest PC expansion and jungle-based console sequel both failed to address the shortcomings of the ageing formula, 22 breakaway members of the original *MOH* team have been striving to take the concept to a whole new level of intensity to wow the gaming world all over again.

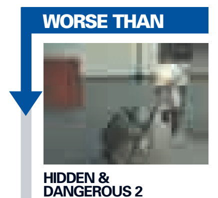
Widely touted as the true sequel to *MOH*, *Call Of Duty* clearly uses the foundations of EA's classic but is superior in every area. Perhaps the most obvious addition to general play is your regular accompaniment by a team of AI squad-mates, placing your character at the centre of some often humbling battlefield encounters. The most memorable moments from the *MOH* series bombarded players with all the sights and sounds of ferocious firefights; *COD* not only fleshes out most scenes with engrossing carnage but really steps up the intensity. Aside from filling the screen with blazing firearms and putting your role as a team player into perspective, the significantly improved tactical awareness of your team makes them a handy bunch to have around. Your enemies and allies have been well drilled in the art

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT



AS GOOD AS

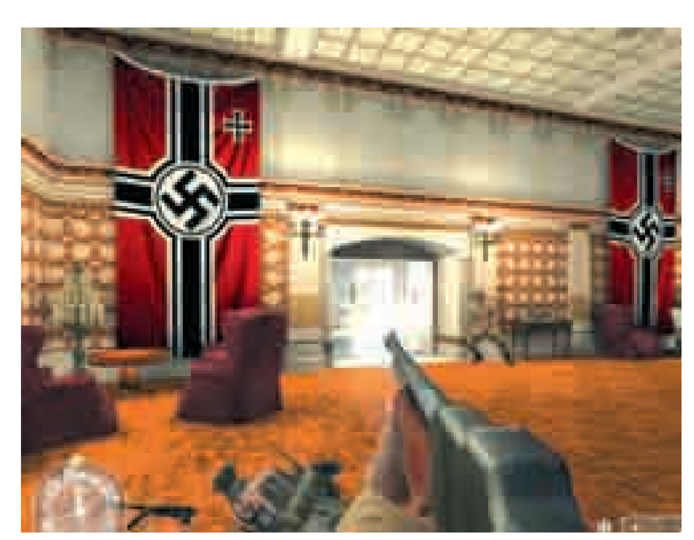
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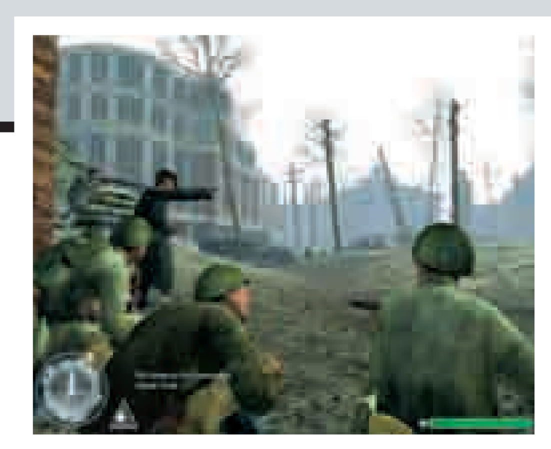
HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

The action moves inside at times, though the pace rarely lets up and you're no safer just because there's a roof over your head…


Shamelessly sticking to its *Enemy At The Gates* template, the Russian campaign sees you enlisting in their sniper division.




The rail-shooter sections are totally scripted, but help create some thrilling cinematic spectacles.



IT'S TOUGH ALL OVER

Players initially take the role of a US paratrooper and will battle their way through several war-torn villages in a *Saving Private Ryan* vein, before stepping into the boots of a British SAS commando and undertaking a series of more calculated strikes on enemy installations. However, it's during your stint as a lowly Russian infantryman that you'll come across the game's most epic cinematic highlight. Recreating the opening scenes of superb sniper flick *Enemy At The Gates* to virtually the last detail, players join the storming of Stalingrad to retake the city from German clutches. Without a weapon the sense of helplessness is overwhelming as thousands of your confused young comrades are slaughtered around you.

of using cover and laying down suppressing fire for each other, and while many of their manoeuvres in battle come from a pre-scripted agenda, there's also plenty of smart improvisation depending on how the situation unfolds. Although you'll play no active part in orchestrating your squad's movements, you'll frequently be issued strategic directions by your commanding officer.

One of the game's greatest achievements is in how the heavily scripted action somehow manages to escape the feeling of linearity that blighted *MOH*. Most probably due to the sheer intensity and urgent pacing of proceedings, it feels surprisingly fitting for players to be swept along at the mercy of the situation, and this allows for some tremendous cinematic structuring at minimal expense to gameplay. Yet however fundamentally staged, the battles are an absolute pleasure to be part of, and many fierce confrontations deliver some of the most thrilling and involving scenes of war since *that* D-Day landing sequence.

Retaining a good balance of authenticity and playability, *COD* is incredibly easy to step into and allows players to endure a generous amount of flak before eventually biting the dust. Targeting is fantastically fluid and precise, and combat is reassuringly solid largely thanks to a vastly advanced incarnation of the *Quake III* engine. The resulting action is as fast and furious as it comes, taking players on an exhilarating rollercoaster ride and racking up one of the highest body counts per second we've seen for a long time. There's very little let-up in the adrenaline-soaked format to cater for fans of a more stealthy and strategic approach, but three diverse campaigns fighting alongside US,


You'll encounter missions using the more traditional *MOH* framework during your time with the SAS boys.

British and Russian forces do offer some variation in perspective (see 'It's tough all over', above).

Despite offering such a range of scenarios, the game's major failing is that it has the same 'live fast, die young' problems we found in the original *MOH*. We'd strongly urge players to try one of the higher difficulty settings from the start, or you're likely to find yourself breezing through the many bite-sized missions in one or two marathon sittings. Whilst the outstanding intensity of the action merits at least a second play, the game's shallow cinematic structuring (linearity is too harsh a word) limits your opportunity to enjoy a varied experience each time. That said, the game is a leap forward for the all-action end of the genre and offers an irrefutably gratifying ride while it lasts.

games™
GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
NEW BLOOD: The solid multiplayer mode should become one of the favoured online WWII shooters.
GIMME FIVE: Three interesting new game types join the standard Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch.

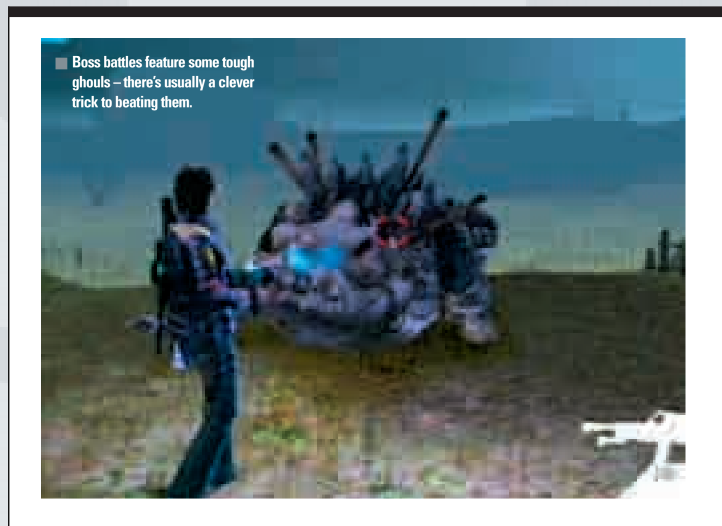
FAQs

Q. HOLLYWOOD CONNECTIONS?
Jason Statham lends his vocal talents to issuing your mission objectives during the British campaign.

Q. AUTHENTIC HARDWARE?
Realistic models of US, British, Russian and German weaponry feature throughout, and actual recordings of said kit in action make for an intense soundtrack.

Q. GET IN THE BACK OF THE VAN?
Several pre-scripted rail-shooter sections involve you in some thrilling vehicle chases.


VERDICT 7/10
LIVES FAST, BUT DIES YOUNG


Boss battles feature some tough ghouls – there's usually a clever trick to beating them.


Your Grenade is the ghost trap, sucking nasties in once you've weakened them with weapons.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
SKIN DEEP: It's sometimes hard to believe this is a PS2 game – it really does look stunning in places.
A TO B: The gameplay in *Ghosthunter* is so linear you could almost use it as a ruler.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED	PlayStation2
ORIGIN	UK
PUBLISHER	Sony
DEVELOPER	SCEE Cambridge
PRICE	£39.99
RELEASE	Out now
PLAYERS	1


THERE'S SOMETHING DISAPPOINTING IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

GHOSTHUNTER

It seems the instantaneous 'cor, look!' factor that wins over easily impressed gamers is what is most important in a game these days. So it's not surprising that *Ghosthunter* is all about first impressions, and thanks to plenty of effort on the part of SCEE Cambridge, it's difficult not to be wowed by the game's visual style when you first see it. Indeed, you might not even think it's a PS2 game to begin with. It's the attention to detail (from fog effects and rippling grass to the animation of hero Lazarus Jones) and the use of visually appealing locations that really stands out; here's hoping we see more of this in the future, now that there's proof the PS2 can do it.

Unfortunately, while it's hard to fault *Ghosthunter*'s technical prowess, the same can't be said about the gameplay. It's almost as though the team forgot that games are meant to be fun, because *Ghosthunter* isn't. At all. In fact, playing it was one of the most laboured experiences we've had lately, due to the painfully linear gameplay from the word go. Quite simply, you can't do anything (honestly, anything) or go anywhere the game doesn't want you to; it's almost an insult to your intelligence in the way the game forces you along a single route with its use of blocked doors and non-interactive scenery.

Even more insulting are the flash icons that appear at the bottom of the screen when you can finally interact with something, forcing you to stumble around looking for anything useable when you run into the inevitable brick wall of not knowing what to do. Not that you'll do that very often – with forehead-slappingly obvious notes that practically spell out each puzzle, and flash icons that tell you what to do even when you don't have the means to do it (doors that require crowbars, planting dynamite and so on), the game plays the part of a frustrated parent constantly telling you how to do things.

Considering that all these problems were present in *Primal* (SCEE Cambridge's last title), you'd have thought someone would have noticed that the same mistakes were being made here. No doubt it'll sell well on the basis of how it looks, but as a game *Ghosthunter* – like *Primal* – is as shallow as they come. Those who want something more than just pretty graphics should look elsewhere.

Revenants look nasty, but they're just the tip of the spectral enemy iceberg…



VERDICT 4/10
ALL STYLE AND NOT MUCH CONTENT

PRIMAL

AS GOOD AS

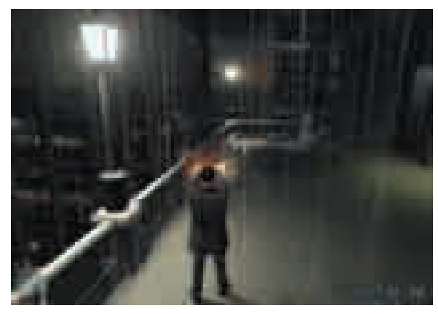
WORSE THAN

STAR FOX ADVENTURES


eMag



Come on, young man, that's not an appropriate use for such a high-precision rifle and you know it.



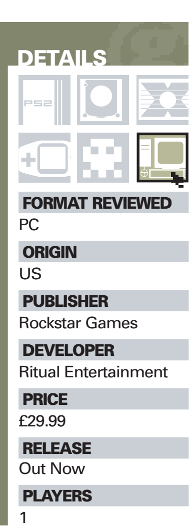
If you're playing on a half-decent PC, prepare to enter a world of pain here. Well, slowdown really, but it's just as bad, right?



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

ALL RISE FOR THE RETURN OF A RELIEVED MAX PAYNE. BETTER LATE THAN NEVER, EH?

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Rockstar Games

DEVELOPER
Ritual Entertainment

PRICE
£29.99

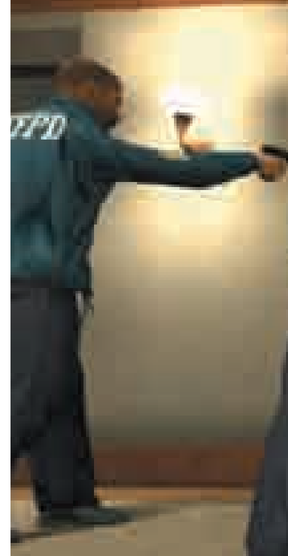
RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

God bless Rockstar. Once again, another high-profile release finds its way into these hallowed pages but it's not thanks to early review builds or presentation events, it's because we had to go and buy a copy. A product this big can't be allowed to slip through the reviewing net but you have to start asking questions when a firm actively refuses publicity for key games like this. As anyone in the industry will tell you, this kind of naughtiness is usually covering for the fact that the product is somewhat below par, but with Rockstar's track record, it's plain to see this is not the case (although the prosecution would like to call *State Of Emergency* to the dock). What we have here goes off the other end of the scale – a kind of Robbie Williams, 'bigger than Jesus' arrogance that, while arguably deserved at times, can't help but annoy, well, everyone. And with that out of our system, we move on to the appallingly subtitled *The Fall Of Max Payne* with clear heads…

With an audience so familiar with the daddy of bullet time, it's tough to know where to start with a game that is identical in so many ways. Diving around in super slow-mo and using all manner of firearms – did we mention the bullet time? – has been done to death since the original *Max Payne* captured the hearts, minds and wallets of gamers and developers alike. How cruel then that the first true sequel to the game that started a generation of gravity-defying, rough-cut heroes should seem a little stale courtesy of so many copycat products. To this end, Max isn't ashamed to round up all the latest buzz features for his second coming, such as the impressive ragdoll physics. We're both surprised and relieved that the temptation to chuck in a stealth section was more or less overcome.

Visually, *Max Payne 2* throws us one hell of a curve ball. On one hand, textures and effects are generally as good as anything we've seen, but on the other it can't escape the classic PC problem of feeling sterile and synthetic in certain places. The art style is nothing short of wonderful, the graphic novel sections, acting and scripting as good as (if not better than) ever, but it's the Havoc engine that ultimately steals the show. Frequent set pieces show what the physics are capable of, but luckily there's ample opportunity to create even more impressive situations with some high explosives and the token angry mob, neither of which are in short supply. Clipping is the only real bugbear – when the rest of the game is so smooth and sharp, it only looks that much worse when Max runs right through a crate, or a dispatched enemy lands with his torso magically embedded in two feet of concrete.



DEAD TO RIGHTS



BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE



MAX PAYNE



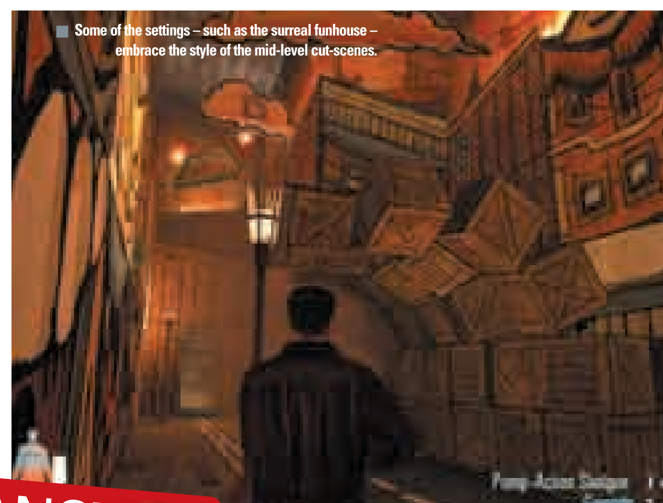
Lighting really helps the mood and feel of the game, even if the narrative does exploit this at times…

FAQs

Q. DREAM SEQUENCES?
Bad news – they're back. Good news – they've been greatly improved since last we saw them.

Q. JUST MAX?
As the more astute among you may have noticed, you'll get to play as Mona for part of the mission. She's a mysterious one…

Q. ACROBATICS?
Accompanying Bullet Time 2.0 is a host of new moves and animations. Max's spinning reload is particularly noteworthy.



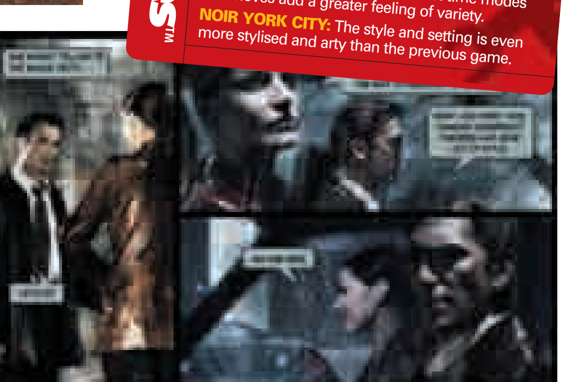
Some of the settings – such as the surreal funhouse – embrace the style of the mid-level cut-scenes.

gamesTM ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

VERSION 2.0: The enhanced bullet-time modes and moves add a greater feeling of variety.

NOIR YORK CITY: The style and setting is even more stylised and arty than the previous game.



The 'Good cop, bad cop' storyline is chock full of surprises – there's more to it than meets the eye.

So far, so good, but there are a few issues that we've skirted around until now, the first of which is most detrimental to gameplay. *Max Payne 2* is a quick-saver's paradise. The tricky nature of the game – particularly as you progress to the later stages – means that the 'clear room, save, repeat' formula which players of the first game will be all too aware of is out in force once again. The difficulty builds rapidly as you work through the multiple settings, and the harsh nature of the game is epitomised by the new Dead Man Walking mode, wherein the objective is simply to stay alive for as long as possible through wave after wave of enemies. It's tricky as hell but makes for great blasting action.

It's clichéd, pretentious and even horribly self-indulgent at times, but *Max Payne 2* is still an absolute joy to play; following the definitive action recipe to the letter seems to have paid off for Remedy. This game summarises all that is good in the action genre despite a few clumsy mistakes – flaws that perhaps could have been fixed by a few extra months in development but that ultimately derail what could have been a game bound for terms like 'genre-defining' and 'glorious'. Don't let the title fool you, though, as the name *The Fall Of Max Payne* is as factually incorrect as it is contrived (unless you take it literally – Max does take a tumble at several points). This second coming is every bit as good as the first.

VERDICT 7/10

A GREAT ACTION SEQUEL DESPITE SEVERAL FLAWS

MOD SQUAD

It's worth mentioning that there are a number of factors that go beyond the depth and scope of the game itself that will help its long-term appeal. The PC mod community helped raise the original game from a great shooter to a superb one – anyone who has tried out the kung fu and *Matrix* mods (the latter of which plays many times better than the officially licensed multi-million dollar game) will find it hard to disagree here. It's a safe bet that the same creative minds will run riot with the impressive Havoc engine, and in a few months time we'll probably start to see the fruits of their labour.

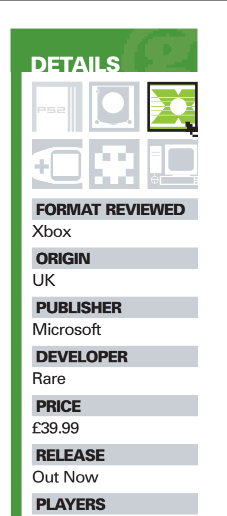


Many games boast ragdoll physics but few can touch the impressive (and often comical) flying bodies that Max leaves in his wake.



Continue to fire after a mid-battle dive and you'll remain prone until you stop shooting.


eMag



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Rare

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES

IT'S GOT A NUDGE-NUDGE NAME, BUT WILL YOU STILL BE LAUGHING AFTER PLAYING THE GAME?

There's no denying that Rare has got a lot to prove. Despite creating a multitude of hits, including at least a dozen triple-A titles for Nintendo, the developer has come in for a lot of flak. Not only did the long-awaited *StarFox Adventures* fail to set the world alight, but it was also in development for almost five years, during which time productivity at Rare seemed to come to a complete halt. *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* is the firm's first non-Nintendo game in almost a decade, but does it recapture some Rare magic?

Though this title certainly won't win any awards for innovation in gameplay, it features Rare's classic British humour in abundance – something that was strangely absent in *StarFox Adventures*. However, beneath all the comedy scripting, hilarious sound bites and glossy presentation lies a surprisingly shallow game that lacks the sophisticated structure of Rare's older titles. Progression revolves almost entirely around entering a room, destroying a number of ghoulish enemies in order to unlock the exit (often within a time limit or in a specified way), then moving on to the next area. To make matters worse, the combat involves nothing more than pointing the right analogue stick towards the nearest enemy and hoping that your moves kick in before you get attacked; the action also feels surprisingly spongy and too unresponsive.

That said, though, there's something about *GBTG* which keeps you coming back for more. Everything is so vibrant and colourful that no matter how frustrating or repetitive it all becomes, you simply won't be able to put that pad down. More than anything else, *GBTG* goes a long way towards proving that Rare still has the ability to create appealing products in unique styles, even if the overall balance of the gameplay is somewhat questionable. This doesn't start Rare's Xbox career with the bang we'd been hoping for, though it's a solid foundation on which great things are likely to be built.

games™ FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER
COOPER COMBAT: Despite what it might look like, this is essentially a scrolling beat-'em-up.
YOU HOLD THE KEY: A fair portion of the game revolves around figuring out simple puzzles.

■ *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* may not test the Xbox when it comes to pushing polygons, but it still looks pretty good.

BLADE 2



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



ZOMBIES ATE MY NEIGHBOURS

■ Though Cooper looks like a fairly standard character, Rare's fantastic animation really brings him to life.

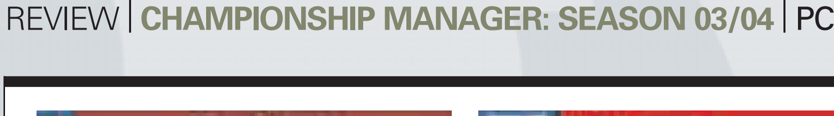


A UNIQUE IF FLAWED OFFERING FROM RARE

■ Death kills Cooper with a single touch. This can be frustrating at times, but at least it always raises a smile.





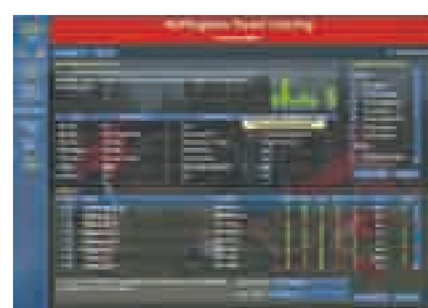


games™ ENHANCED

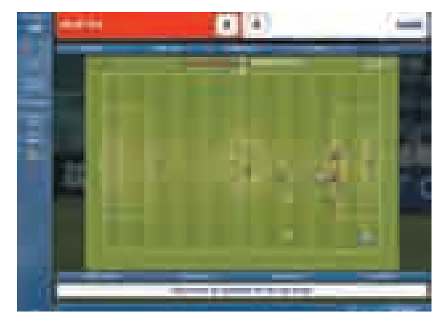
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

DIY: *03/04* has an official data editor for updating the database come the next transfer window.

VIDEO LIBRARY: Save match files of vintage games to relive the glory days when times aren't so good.



The Training screen is a fine example of the game's much more efficiently structured interfaces.



An optional action replay feature now allows you to revel in the glory of those special strikes time and again.

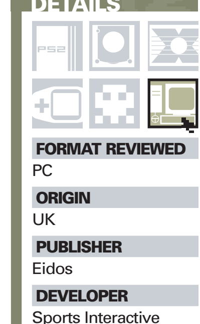


Players demonstrate a vastly improved repertoire of skill and movement, making matches far more entertaining. This also means that you can now more accurately base your tactics on what actually happens on the pitch.

STILL OUR FAVOURITE WASTE OF TIME?

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 03/04

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Sports Interactive

PRICE
£24.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-16

MINIMUM SPEC
600MHz processor, 64Mb RAM, 300Mb HDD space, 16Mb video card

After all the excitement surrounding the unveiling of *Championship Manager 4* and its revolutionary 2D match engine earlier this year, its back to business as usual. This is the franchise's first seasonal update since the age-old format underwent some sweeping changes. Yet while we prepared ourselves for just another generic data update with maybe a couple of interesting new features thrown in for good measure, the fact that this incarnation of the game spells the end of the road for SI and the legendary *Champ Manager* brand name gave us an inkling the developer would give the series a worthy swansong. More specifically, with the dust settled on the novelty of *CM4*'s landmark amendments it was now time for the SI team to really go to work on the new engine and mop up those remaining cynics still clinging to the traditional *Champ Manager* interface.

Having seen no fewer than five enhancement packs released by SI to iron out the imperfections that shipped with *CM4*, we were expecting the match engine for *03/04* to have undergone a similar degree of tweaking, yet to our delight these tepid expectations were surpassed with aplomb. Play is unrecognisably fluid, with players demonstrating massively heightened intelligence and knocking around reflex passes at a blistering rate. Evolving from the somewhat mechanical dynamics of the last game into a spectacle of one-touch football and individual flair, not only are matches now genuinely thrilling to watch but they also create a more authentic representation of the beautiful game on which to base your tactics.

Aside from the unexpected leap forward at the very heart of the game, there's the small matter of the countless tweaks, inspired new additions and complete database overhaul to mention. Most notable is the increased dialogue that places events into a more wholesome context, plus the added dimension to player personalities and a far more perceptive media evaluating your every move. On the whole, however, it's the superb enrichment of the all-important match engine that should convert the commentary-only purists who weren't convinced by *CM4*.



VERDICT 9/10

A FITTINGLY SUPERB SWANSONG



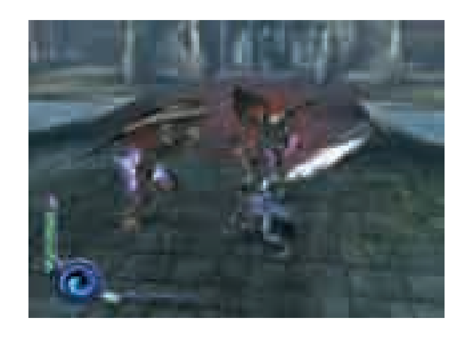
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4

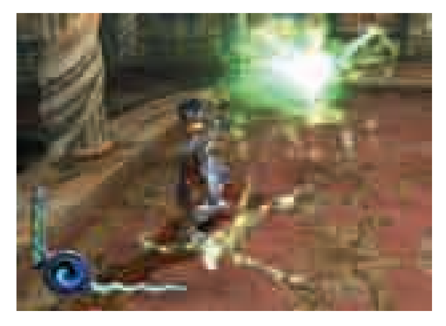
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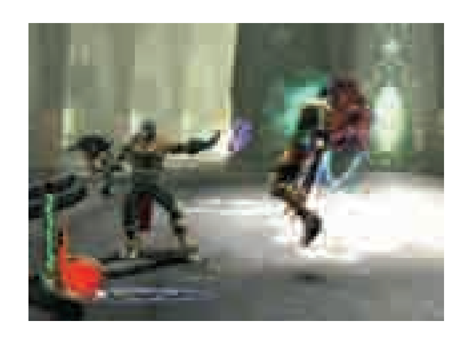


JUST LIKE

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4







FINALLY, A KAIN GAME YOU CAN REALLY GET YOUR TEETH INTO

LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Crystal Dynamics

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
January '04

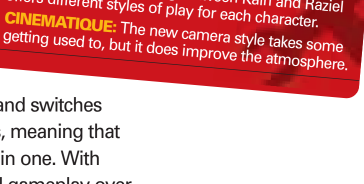
PLAYERS
1

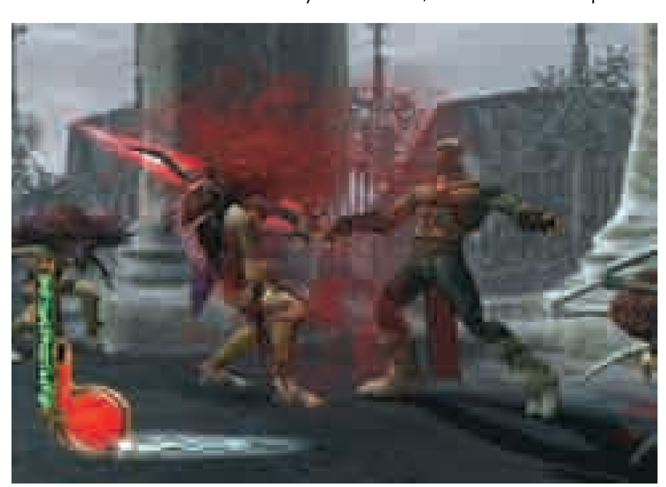
Quality storytelling in games – the kind that keeps you engrossed for ages and leaves you on a knife edge when the cliffhanger ending finally arrives – is something of a lost art these days, so it's comforting to see that some developers have still got the knack. Take the *Legacy Of Kain* series, for example: with fans of the franchise being led a merry dance for no less than four games just to follow a single plotline, it stands as a fine example of videogame storytelling, even if some of the games themselves haven't been that great.

Whereas *Soul Reaver 2* and *Blood Omen 2* lacked a decent balance between solid narrative and enjoyable gameplay, though, Crystal Dynamics appears to have made up for this with *LOK: Defiance*. While still featuring the tell-tale mixture of intense plot and high-quality voice acting that has been present throughout the whole series, the new cinematic styling offered by fixed camera angles (as opposed to placing it behind your character) adds a lot of atmosphere to the proceedings. What's more, *Defiance* features both protagonists from the series – vampire Kain and ex-vampire-cum-demon Raziel – and switches between them at regular intervals, meaning that you've effectively got two games in one. With Kain's stages using combat-based gameplay over puzzles and Raziel's requiring more thought and exploration than fighting (but each having plenty of both), you'll have to adjust your playing style according to who you're controlling.

The fact that *Defiance* makes up for the shortcomings of the last two *LOK* games – *Soul Reaver 2*'s feeling of being cut short and *Blood Omen 2*'s awful control system – leaves it as possibly the strongest title in the series yet, or at least on a par with the hugely satisfying *Soul Reaver*. But that isn't to say it isn't without its flaws. For example, the new semi-fixed camera can cause problems when the action moves behind certain parts of the scenery or so close that it can't decide which way to pan. Some people may also be put off by the action-intensive sections later in the game where you fight groups of powerful enemies over and over across a relatively short distance, as these can get slightly repetitive and tiresome.

That said, we can't help but have a soft spot for *Defiance*, if only because it not only looks impressive, but it kept us captivated right up to yet another tense climax; a rare combination for most recent games.





Impaling enemies with the Soul Reaver fills the sword's Soul Energy and allows you to cast various spells.

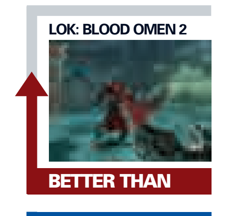
VERDICT 7/10
A HIGH POINT IN THE SERIES, WITHOUT QUESTION

XBOX £39.99



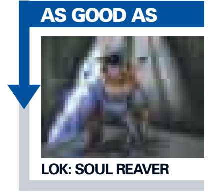
Surprisingly, the Xbox version doesn't actually look that much better than the PS2 one – although that's a bonus for PS2 owners, rather than a downer for Xbox fans.

LOK: BLOOD OMEN 2



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



LOK: SOUL REAVER

Some mountains, such as Three Ring Circus, require the player to obtain high scores over three timed runs.



Grab the attention of the media and they'll snap your tricks or laugh at the way you wipe out and eat powder.



games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
YOU DECIDE: As a part of Microsoft's XSN line-up you can hold personalised leagues and tournaments on XSNsports.com. Your data will then be uploaded to the site for all to see.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Microsoft Studios

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

AMPED 2

IS MICROSOFT TRICKED OUT, OR JUST SICK?

Snowboarding doesn't take itself too seriously – after all, hurtling down a mountain on a fibreglass board has never been the preserve of the calm and sensible – yet the first *Amped* game tried to put some serious realism into the sport. It was still a resounding success, but the main sticking point with *Amped 2* is that it flies further in the face of the ethic the sport lives by, removing its proverbial tongue from its metaphorical cheek. And, unfortunately, it's all, er, downhill from there.

In a desperate attempt to inject more realism into the game, Microsoft has taken away much of the enjoyment and, as a result, the gameplay suffers – take offs seem random, spins and flips samey and all the grabs pointless. The trick element often makes or breaks an extreme sports game and *Amped 2* is hampered by the fact that most of the contortions and spins the player can execute appear the same. As such, pulling off a ten-thousand-point combo is no more satisfying than trying to snatch some meagre credit at the end of a run to try and beat the mountain high score.

The action varies a little through Sponsor Challenges, Photo Shoots and Beat The Pro runs, but often the frustration of repeating the same task over and over makes the player yearn for the relaxed mediocrity of the main mountain courses. The MOR rock soundtrack, despite Microsoft's claim that it contains over three hundred tunes, only quickens your slide towards total gaming apathy, while the ropey glitches and substandard collision detection are not what anyone would expect from a first-party title.

As a package, though, *Amped 2* can barely be faulted and other developers should stand up and take notes about how they can best present their games. Full Live support, XSN tables and leagues, split-screen multiplayer and more customisations than you can shake a hefty, snow-covered stick at make *Amped 2* exceedingly good value for money – if you can stomach hours of the disappointing main game. Unfortunately, as eye-catching as the wrapping is, the present inside is without much soul or substance. Best leave this one under the tree.



VERDICT 5/10
DISAPPOINTMENT, THY NAME IS AMPED 2



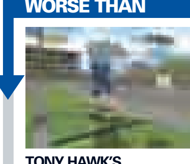
Sick tricks will earn you plenty of points, allowing skill upgrades and unlocking other mountains.

DARK SUMMIT



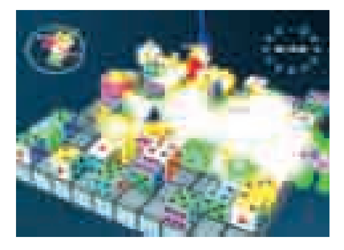
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



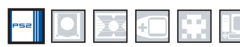
TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4


eMag









FORMAT REVIEWED PlayStation2 **ORIGIN** Japan **PUBLISHER** Capcom
PRICE £29.99 **RELEASE** 21 December **PLAYERS** 1-2

EXPLODING ONTO THE PUZZLE SCENE

BOMBASTIC

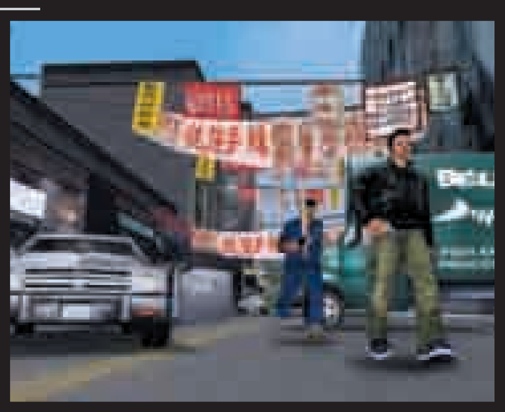
According to our dictionary, bombastic means long-winded or pompous, which makes this a strange name for Capcom's dice puzzler because it's anything but. You may remember the PSone's *Devil Dice*, a game that asked you to race against the clock, lining up dice according to the numbers on the faces (put six sixes together, for example). *Bombastic* is the sequel and the same rules apply except the dice now explode when grouped, opening up combo potential.

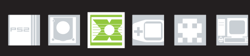
While the addictive qualities are still intact, the addition of explosions has slightly upset the delicate balance, as your mind will be multi-tasking at lightning speeds to plan in advance. Some might argue that's a good thing but the big combos here tend to owe as much to good fortune as they do prudence and it can feel like you're over-working your brain for too little result. Quest mode provides a much-needed breather, as it eliminates the clock and concentrates on puzzles and colourful boss battles.

Bombastic is the perfect title to plug the chasm of puzzle games with an easy-to-grasp concept and bags of character. 'Quaint' or 'Endearing' might not be as good a name as *Bombastic* but it's certainly a better way to describe the game.

VERDICT 7/10







FORMAT Xbox **ORIGIN** US **PUBLISHER** Take 2 Interactive
PRICE £49.99 **RELEASE** TBC (US: Out Now) **PLAYERS** 1

GRAND THEFT AUTO DOUBLE PACK

YET MORE CONTROVERSY, THIS TIME XBOX BOUND…

Coming from the first firm to bump up the price of a Platinum game, a value pack such as this is hardly the way we'd have imagined *GTA* hitting the Xbox. Not that we're complaining – we can't imagine Xbox owners being particularly peeved at paying the same price as PS2 owners, even if the games are a little on the late side…

Augmentations to the already attractive package include lip-synching for cut-scenes, improved visuals across the board to make use of the superior hardware, and custom soundtrack support. Each of your soundtracks takes the form of a selectable tape or CD that you can throw on in the radio ad breaks; just make sure you're back on the airwaves before the chorus of *Broken Wings* kicks in.

There are two ways of looking at this package: on the one hand, you've got a couple of ageing PlayStation2 games thrown at an audience who only have *True Crime* for company; and on the other, Xbox gamers have been granted superior versions of two of the best mainstream games of this generation. However you view it, these are two superb games, these are the best versions and, like it or not, they will find their way into many an Xbox collection, and deservedly so.

VERDICT 9/10



FORMAT REVIEWED Xbox **ORIGIN** US **PUBLISHER** Microsoft
PRICE £39.99 **RELEASE** Out Now **PLAYERS** 1-4

LINKS 2004

ANOTHER GOLF GAME? JOIN THE CLUB…

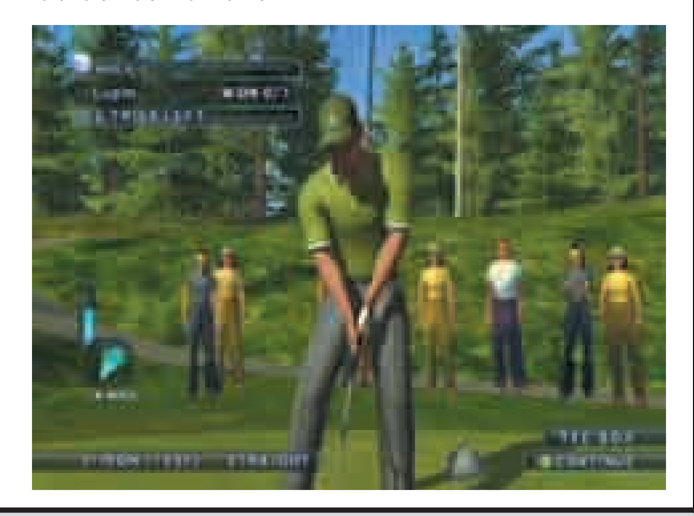
Launching a golf game within months of the latest addition to the respectable *Tiger Woods* series takes a lot of nerve, but apparently Microsoft is not afraid of a little competition. And why should it be? While *Links* may be slightly inferior to the EA title from a technical standpoint, it has one major bonus over its annually updated rival – online play.

Links basically offers a no-frills golfing experience, and while online play is certainly a respectable inclusion this sport is perhaps not the best to truly exploit the potential of Xbox Live. Voice, soundtrack and online play all make good use of the console's abilities but, sadly, the visuals don't exactly trouble the hardware in a similar manner.

Commentary is another matter entirely, offering up a good range of interesting and informative samples.

Certainly enjoyable, Microsoft's first foray into Xbox golf is a valiant effort, and if it weren't for the existence of a certain pro-based title we're sure it'd be much easier to get excited about it. There's plenty to do and see (within the golf spectrum, naturally) but at the end of the day, there's just not enough real magic or involvement to keep you coming back for more.

VERDICT 6/10





FORMAT REVIEWED Xbox **OTHER FORMATS** PS2, GameCube, PC, GBA
ORIGIN US **PUBLISHER** EA **PRICE** £39.99 **RELEASE** Out Now **PLAYERS** 1-2

NICE WHEELS, SHAME ABOUT THE RACE

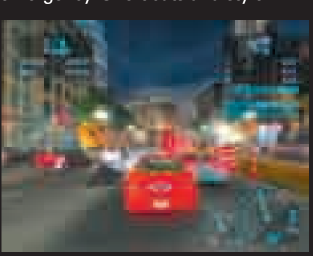
NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND

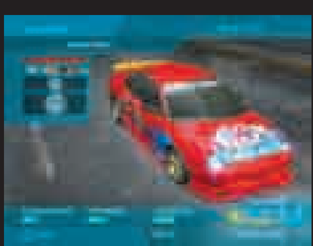
Emerging as the bastard lovechild of EA's conveyor-belt mentality and the recent surge in car-modding, *Need For Speed: Underground* aims for street cred and hits the bullseye. Alas, having been so pre-occupied with looking cool, it seems EA forgot to make the gameplay trendy as well.

Car customisation options are plentiful, allowing you to dress up your dream muscle motor with new spoilers, vinyl stickers, neon lights and so on. However, cracks appear when you take your shiny new motor to the circuit. The racing – you know, what you actually do with your car once you finish tweaking it – isn't as adrenaline-charged as it should be. Crashes are underwhelming (the lack of damage doesn't help) and there's no sense of emergency. Short cuts and style points spice up the well-worn racing formula, otherwise there's nothing to suggest *Underground* is anything other than average.

Without Xbox Live, the potential for showing off your customised car is limited, and considering exposure is half the fun (oh, come now, why else buy that gold twin exhaust?) this feels like a wasted opportunity. Boy racers will love *Underground*'s edgy urban chic, otherwise you should stick with the less fashionable but ultimately more enjoyable *Burnout 2*.

VERDICT 5/10









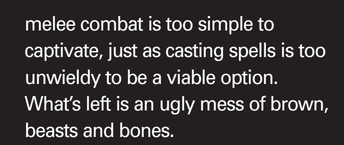




FORMAT REVIEWED Xbox **ORIGIN** US **PUBLISHER** Dreamcatcher Interactive
PRICE £39.99 **RELEASE** Out Now **PLAYERS** 1

EVEN WORSE THAN ITS NAME

ARX FATALIS



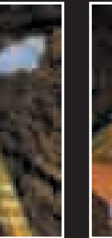
The beginning of *Arx Fatalis* finds you in a brown jail cell. You escape by killing the beast guarding your cell, which is done by standing in front of him and hitting him several times with a bone. Then you need to negotiate a brown labyrinth to find some rope and magic spells. After that, you fight a goblin lord, who you stand in front of and hit several times with a bone until he dies.

■ If the introduction to this review fails to convey the excitement of *Arx Fatalis*, that's because there's none to convey. While improving slightly with the acquisition of better weapons and magic, it's still the faintest of pulses on a cadaver we've seen many times before – identikit dungeons, faceless monsters and convoluted menu systems should be a thing of the past by now. The melee combat is too simple to captivate, just as casting spells is too unwieldy to be a viable option. What's left is an ugly mess of brown, beasts and bones.

■ Games like *Morrowind* have taken this admittedly tricky genre by the horns; *Arx*, on the other hand, appears to be suffering from severe internal bleeding following a failed attempt to follow in the former's matadorial footsteps. The hardest of hardcore RPG fans might squeeze some drops of enjoyment from *Arx Fatalis*, but with the Xbox finally getting its act together on the RPG front, there's no reason to buy this.



VERDICT 2/10

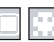













FORMAT REVIEWED Xbox **OTHER FORMATS** PS2, GameCube, GBA **ORIGIN** US
PUBLISHER EA **PRICE** £39.99 **RELEASE** 12 December **PLAYERS** 1-2

THE SIMS BUSTIN' OUT

THAT'S A LOT LIKE LIFE…

Face it – everybody loves *The Sims*. The fact that the console versions have never approached the glory of their PC predecessors is somewhat overshadowed by impressive sales figures across the board. But then the console ports seem a whole lot more impressive when you've never sampled the PC original and all its web-fuelled longevity. Thankfully, EA has finally realised that this is a console game and should be adjusted accordingly.

■ The linear main mode now consists of much more than just a free game on rails, offering a nice variety of cut-scenes and odd objectives, and Free mode allows you to play through as you like unhindered. Many elements from the PC add-ons find their way into the game too – house visits and many new interaction options make for a much more varied experience.

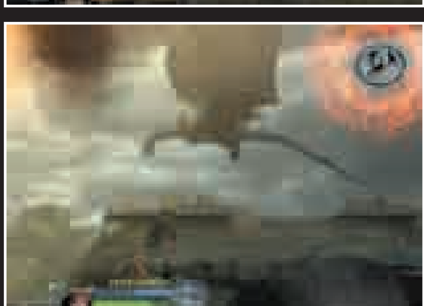
■ Ultimately, though, despite a veritable host of respectable changes and additions, this still can't live up to the standards of the original game. Fewer locked items and an option for connectivity (in the GameCube version) are neat touches, but this is a title that would benefit hugely from downloadable content. An improvement over the last console effort, but with so much more potential than is actually realised, *Bustin' Out* still disappoints a little.

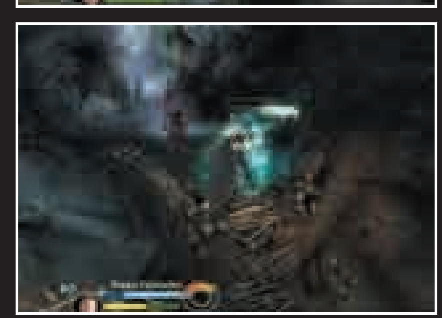


VERDICT 6/10











FORMAT Xbox **ORIGIN** US **PUBLISHER** EA
PRICE £39.99 **RELEASE** Out Now **PLAYERS** 1-2

LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING

TWO TOWERS WITH TWO PLAYERS

With so many potentially great film and TV licences making dreadful videogame transitions over the past six months, we placed Electronic Arts' latest adaptation into our Xbox with a heavy heart. Fortunately, not only does *The Return Of The King* manage to restore our faith in how a developer should successfully use a licence to create an impressive game world, it also turns out to be a reasonably good game too…

■ Using an enhanced version of the *Two Towers'* graphics engine, Middle Earth and its many gruesome inhabitants have never looked better. But *Return Of The King* is as archaic as it is beautiful and for all its visual splendour, it's effectively little more than a 3D update of SEGA's classic *Golden Axe*. Indeed, upon first play it seems that EA has learnt little during the year since the release of *The Two Towers*, though progression through the game reveals this to be less true than it first seems.

■ The co-operative mode we were all crying out for proves somewhat less impressive, and while the action is definitely more enjoyable with two, there are still some horrible flaws in scrolling, contact and visibility (which, we hasten to add, aren't exclusively seen in multiplayer). It's considerably better than last year's sorry attempt but there's still plenty of room for improvement.

VERDICT 5/10







FORMAT PC **ORIGIN** Germany **PUBLISHER** Big Ben Interactive
PRICE £29.99 **RELEASE** Out Now **PLAYERS** 1

SPELLCASTING, G… E… N… E… R… I… C

SPELLFORCE: THE ORDER OF DAWN

If you were piecing together the ultimate stereotypical PC game, our guess is that the end result would look a lot like *SpellForce*. Goblins, magic, unpronounceable names… the list of clichés just gets longer as you progress through the game. From the off, the presentation and music are good signs, but once you overcome the horrendous loading times, the game itself is far less glamorous.

□ For some reason, *SpellForce* requires an absolute beast of a machine despite being far less visually impressive than many smoother-running and more attractive titles. A little optimisation goes a long way… That's not to say *SpellForce* is a bad game as such – beneath its horribly dated exterior lie some unique ideas, and the blend of genres works really quite well.

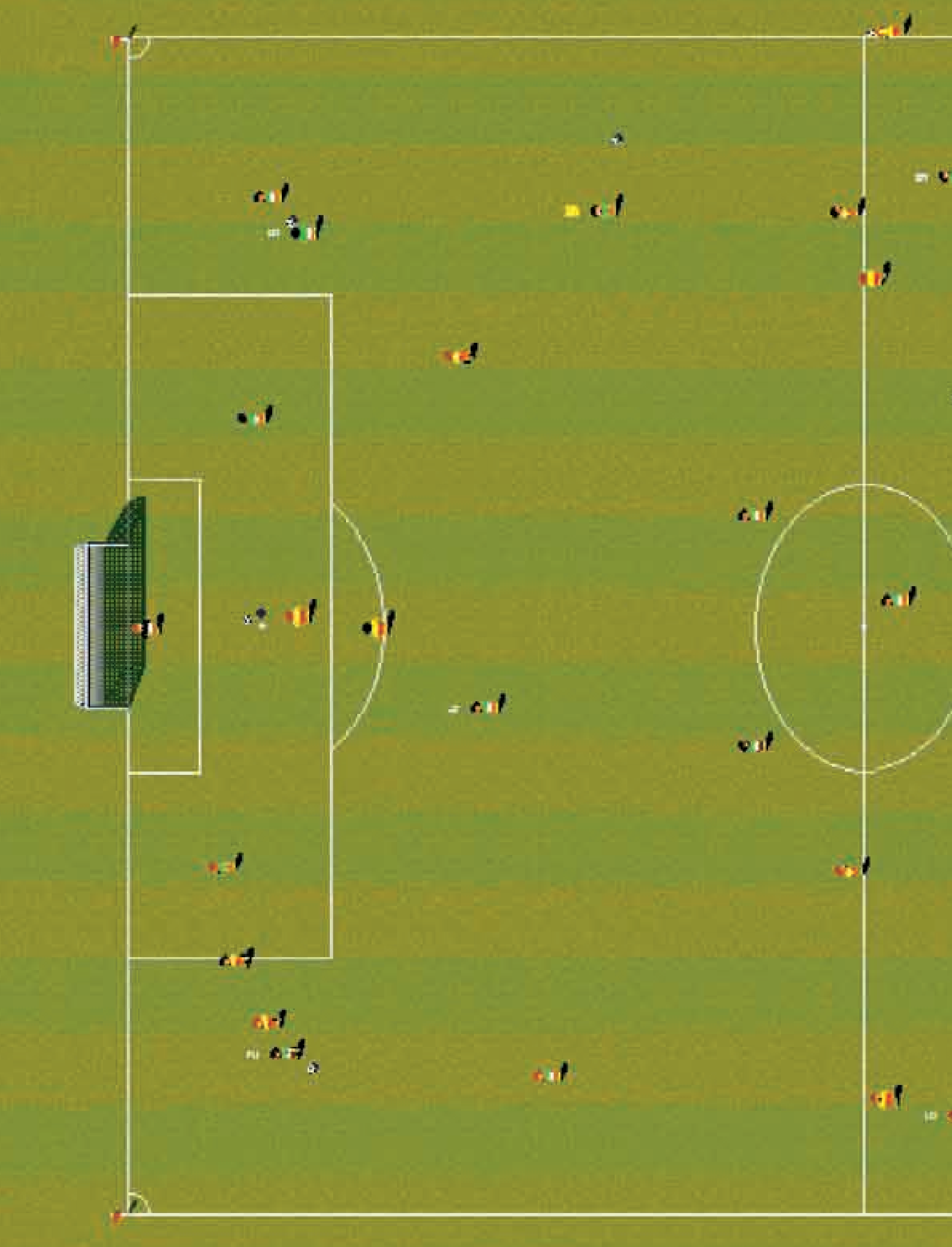
□ Unfortunately, unskippable and dragging cut-scenes often break up the action, and the prologue section was apparently designed for absolute beginners or the extremely patient – the plodding pace of the game as a whole will no doubt scare off a few possible candidates.

□ Ultimately, though, the PC is a hotbed for both strategy and RTS action and it won't take much browsing to find a superior title that knocks this into a cocked hat. Close but no Cigar of Divine Mildness +3.





VERDICT 5/10





It's a game of two halves, Ron... **Sensible World Of Soccer Amiga [Sensible Software] 1994**


eMag


A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.13 DECEMBER 2003
RETRO
00p
MICRO GAMES ACTION
Christmas Special
LYLAT WARS
Or was it StarFox… or StarWing?
DREAMCASTLEVANIA
Konami's game that never quite made it
DO YOU REMEMBER…
The classic beat-'em-up Target Renegade?
BOUNCING BACK
We remember Monkey Island's rubber tree
PLUS! RETRO ADS OF YESTERYEAR!
SPACE INVADERS
PC ENGINE
CLASSIC MACHINE OF THE MONTH
MONTHLY ALL-FORMAT RETRO GAMES FUN!
DRAGON'S LAIR
WAS IT THE WORST GAME EVER?
BUY AND SELL YOUR OLD GAMES IN GTM!



FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE HERE AND NOW OF RETRO GAMING…

With Christmas looming, we've been remembering our fondest gaming moments from past festive seasons. Being import gamers, titles like *Shenmue*, *Sonic Adventure* and *Yoshi's Story* spring to mind as the ones that made it through customs just in time for Christmas in recent years.

Of course, our treasured festive memories go back further than that. In 1994, we were all playing Saturns and PlayStations for the first time, and enjoying those 3D graphics…

Go back further still, and we were playing the SNES, Mega Drive, Amiga, NES, C64 and ZX Spectrum, amongst others – all formats that were boosted by strong software over the Christmas period.

I wonder how we'll look back on Christmas 2003 in five years or so. Perhaps you'll be reading about how far things have come since the release of retro titles like *PGR2*, *Rainbow Six 3*, and *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*…

Keith Edwards, Retro Editor

Mario gets all hot under the collar

Moustachioed plumber helps Nintendo fans get hold of limited edition handheld consoles



With Nintendo's limited edition Famicom GBA SP already selling for around $450 on eBay (around £265), Nintendo has decided to produce a further run of the highly desirable console. This time around, 3,000 machines will be produced and will all feature an additional bonus – a GBA version of the original *Super Mario Bros* NES title. Nintendo hasn't revealed if *Super Mario Bros* will be a straightforward port of the classic 1985 NES game, or a more consumer-friendly remake in the style of the recently released *Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros 3*.

Sadly, these consoles will only be available to Japanese gamers who belong to Club Nintendo and who take part in the 'Hot Mario!' campaign. By buying any two games from a list of certain GameCube and GBA titles and then registering them on Club Nintendo's website, they are entered into a draw to win one of the machines.

It's highly unlikely that this competition will appear in the UK, so you'd better start saving some pennies and hope that a few more old-school-style GBA SPs turn up on eBay…



▲ Want one of these? Join the queue. And, er, move to Japan and buy a GameCube as well.

GP32 fails to cross the channel

Retro console launch is cancelled

Just when it looked like Gamepark's GP32 would finally appear in UK shops, its launch was abruptly cancelled. While the GP32 was never going to be able to compete against the might of the GBA, it was great for playing retro games on the move and offered a variety of different emulators as well as a healthy homebrew scene.

But if you're still interested in buying one of these unique consoles, all is not lost. Plenty of import sites such as Lik Sang stock the machines along with a selection of games, and once you've registered your machine at http://english.gamepark.com you're free to explore the many homebrew sites. Pages such as www.gp32emu.com contain a wealth of information and include friendly forums as well as plenty of updated games to try out.

We're huge fans of the GP32 and it's a shame it won't get the audience it deserves.



▲ Though it was never going to threaten the GBA, but a UK release would have been very welcome.

Let the celebrations commence

SEGA COMMEMORATES TEN YEARS OF VIRTUA FIGHTER

It's strange to think that one of the most successful 3D beat-'em-ups of all time has been engaging gamers for a decade. It seems like only yesterday we were standing in awe, mesmerised by *Virtua Fighter*'s sheer (blocky) beauty.

As a result, SEGA has decided to follow Capcom's recent *Street Fighter* fifteenth anniversary CD and produce something special to commemorate its long-running franchise. The *Virtua Fighter* limited-edition 'mook' (or magazine-book, if you will) will be released soon to coincide with *Virtua Fighter*'s tenth anniversary.

The mook will contain a copy of *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution* – complete with LEGO-like polygon graphics – as well as a second disc that will feature interviews about and artwork from the successful franchise.

This Month In 1993

December 1993 – boy bands slugged it out whilst Mr. Blobby reigned supreme. This month also saw the launch of Atari's ill-fated final stab at regaining console supremacy. Shame on any of you that bought the pink and yellow moron's record, and don't even start us on the band that brought us Robbie Williams…

GAMING NEWS DEC '93

Atari's Jaguar fails to pounce on gamers

Having dominated the games console market in the early Eighties, ailing company Atari chose to have another stab at a market that was dominated by SEGA and Nintendo.
Launched in December 1993, the Atari Jaguar claimed to be the world's first 64-bit console. But though the machine itself was pretty impressive, the console was not quite the '64-bit wonder' that Atari claimed it to be.

A closer inspection of the internal structure of the Jaguar revealed that it actually contained five processors that were mounted on three chips, one of which was a rather feeble 16bit Motorola 68000. Of the remaining chips, only two were actually 64bit, a fact that caused consternation from an already unconvinced and hostile development community.

Worse still, Atari rankled developers and publishers alike by claiming that over a hundred developers were already on board creating games for the machine. As it transpired, few games got any further than the planning stages, and of those that did, few managed to tap into the potential of what was, in truth, a pretty capable console for its time.



▲ Yes, *Tempest 2000* was great. But the console still looked like a toilet seat.

Arguably Atari's biggest faux pas was its total failure to market the Jaguar to the public, and only hardcore gamers were aware of its existence (most were attracted to the reworked Jeff Minter classic *Tempest 2000*).

Couple this with an ill-timed CD add-on (that boasted a whopping nine games), released when interest and attention was already being drawn towards the PSone and the Saturn, and it'll come as no surprise that all too quickly the Jaguar met with a premature end, taking Atari with it.

UK Charts For Dec 1993

1. **Mr. Blobby** – Mr. Blobby
2. **I'll Do Anything For Love (But I Won't Do that)** – Meatloaf
3. **True Love** – Elton John & Kiki Dee
4. **For Whom The Bell Tolls** – The Bee Gees
5. **Please Forgive Me** – Bryan Adams
6. **Don't Be A Stranger** – Dina Carroll
7. **It's Alright** – East 17
8. **Babe** – Take That
9. **Stay (Faraway, So Close) / I've Got You Under My Skin** – U2
10. **Don't Look Any Further** – M People

Top movies in America, 1993

1. **Jurassic Park** – $356,784,000
2. **Mrs Doubtfire** – $219,200,000
3. **The Fugitive** – $183,875,760
4. **The Firm** – $158, 348, 400
5. **Sleepless In Seattle** – $126,533,006
6. **Indecent Proposal** – $106,614,100
7. **In The Line Of Fire** – $102,314,283
8. **The Pelican Brief** – $100,768,056
9. **Schindler's List** – $96,067,179
10. **Cliffhanger** – $84,049,211

I•N T•H•E N•E•W•S

FIRST STEPS ON THE ROAD TO PEACE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

It was in this month in 1993 that the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, John Major and Albert Reynolds, signed the Downing Street Declaration which was another step towards bringing about peace in Northern Ireland.



▲ Major and Reynolds – available for parties.

The deal stated that Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, could join talks regarding the future of Northern Ireland if the IRA renounced violence. Democratic loyalist parties were also invited to engage in the talks if their equivalent paramilitary groups brought an end to their activities.

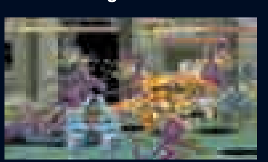
Months of talks followed which led to the IRA announcing a 'complete cessation of military activities' on 31 August, 1994.

There was, however, no guarantee that this ceasefire would hold permanently…

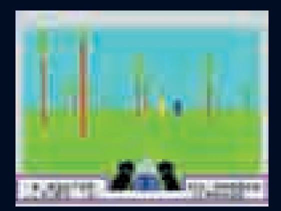
THIS MONTH'S FAVOURITES

Here are just a few of the gaming nuggets we've been hammering away at this issue

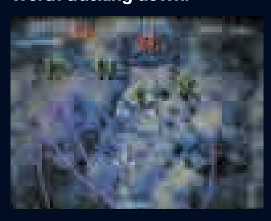
ALIEN VS PREDATOR
Back in the mid-Nineties, no-one made scrolling beat-'em-ups like Capcom. Along with *The Punisher* (also by Capcom) *Alien Vs Predator* was gaming nirvana for fight fans.



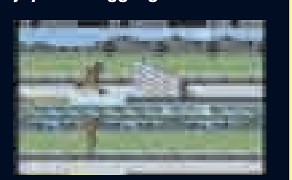
3D DEATH CHASE
Deemed by many to be the greatest Spectrum game of all time, *3D Death Chase* required nerves of steel and incredible reflexes. Just as playable now as it ever was.



SOUKYUGURENTAI
Souky (as hardcore gamers often called it) was one of the finest shooters on the Saturn. Graphically impressive and full of outrageous bosses and millions of bullets it's well worth tracking down.



COMBAT SCHOOL
A quick play on the C64's version of *Combat School* reminded us of two things; the music has a fantastic rendition of *I Want To Be Your Drill Instructor*, and the game is joystick-waggling hell.



GAMES THAT NEVER QUITE MADE IT…

CASTLEVANIA RESURRECTION

GAMES THAT NEVER QUITE MADE IT…

Trapped in development hell? Never translated from Japanese? Some games just can't quite reach the Western market. Castlevania Resurrection was one of them

Title: **Castlevania Resurrection**
Developer: **Konami**
Format: **Dreamcast**
Release date: **N/A**

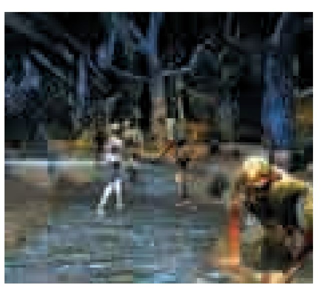
Konami's *Castlevania* series has always been a firm favourite with gamers thanks to its fantastic scores, eerie atmosphere and absorbing gameplay. With *Castlevania: Lament Of Innocence* just around the corner, now seems like the perfect time to mourn the loss of the Dreamcast game that never came to be…

After Konami's lacklustre efforts on the N64 with *Castlevania 64* and *Castlevania: Legacy Of Darkness*, many fans were less than happy that the series would not be returning to its original 2D roots. Indeed, early screenshots of *Castlevania: Resurrection* revealed a game that looked suspiciously similar to the two N64 titles and featured foggy visuals, polygon-lite characters and alarmingly poor texturing. But loyal fans kept their fingers crossed, and the preview code revealed a game that looked more like the next-generation title it was meant to be.

Camera angles had been improved over the N64 incarnations, the expansive environments were beginning to look truly stunning, and there were a number of impressive action sequences. In addition, many familiar bosses were set to return (including *Castlevania* stalwarts Death and Medusa) and Konami was aiming to introduce no fewer than 30 macabre monstrosities (most of which were new to the series). In fact, everything about *Resurrection* was seemingly coming along very nicely, and many gamers were even beginning to believe that the difficult transition from 2D to 3D would finally be achieved. But then disaster struck.



▲ The original blocky footage was replaced by some impressive code. But that was as far as this game got.





After numerous delays (it was originally down as a Dreamcast launch title in the US), Konami said that *Castlevania: Resurrection* was to be placed 'on indefinite hold'. Fans were distraught – such was the game's following, some people are still signing a petition for the game to receive its Dreamcast release. Despite the various rumours that had spread across the internet in the months leading up to the cancellation, Konami eventually cited 'a lack of development resources' as the real reason for *Castlevania Resurrection*'s demise.

While a cancelled game is nothing new, the loss of *Resurrection* was a particular shame. We're huge fans of the series, and though the time-travel plot was a little suspect – a vampire countess summons Dracula to the year 1666 along with the first and last members of the Belmont legacy – Konami was apparently trying to steer the franchise away from the puzzle-based elements of the N64 titles and make the game more action-led. The fact that *Resurrection* was laid to rest is perfect proof that no game is infallible, no matter how impressive its heritage.

DON'T GO CHANGING

So why do our games look different to everyone else's then…?

LYLAT WARS

Well, we say Lylat Wars. It might be StarFox. Or perhaps StarWing. We're not really sure, actually…

When *Lylat Wars* first appeared in 1997, gamers were more than a little confused that it didn't share the same name as its American and Japanese counterparts. Ever since Nintendo released the original *StarFox* series on the SNES, the popular franchise has always had to be renamed for its European audience.

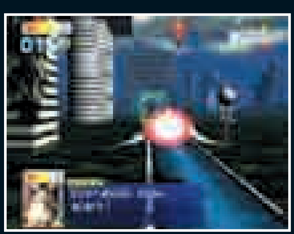
But while the games we've previously examined in this column have been altered due to culture clashes or the danger of causing offence, the reasons behind *Lylat Wars*' non-Foxy moniker were much more mundane. It simply came down to the fact that the *StarFox* name was already registered with another company. Despite being released on the Spectrum in 1987, the *StarFox* rights were still valid, meaning Nintendo simply renamed its groundbreaking game *StarWing*.

So why didn't the company call the 64-bit sequel *StarWing64*? Once again, it came down to a simple case of ownership; the *StarWing* name had been re-registered to an Australian company and Nintendo needed to find yet another name for its popular franchise.

This wasn't the only name change the series received, however, as the final boss was also given a brand new identity. No doubt cautious because of its Hitler-esque overtones, Andolf in *StarWing* and *Lylat Wars* became known as Andross in the West. If the SNES's infamous *StarFox II* gets released on the GBA, we may see another name change – unless, of course, Nintendo has kept hold of the licence this time…







STAR GAMES!

If you though the stars were bad, you should have seen what the extras were getting up to when they played Final Fantasy VIII in Charlie's Angels…

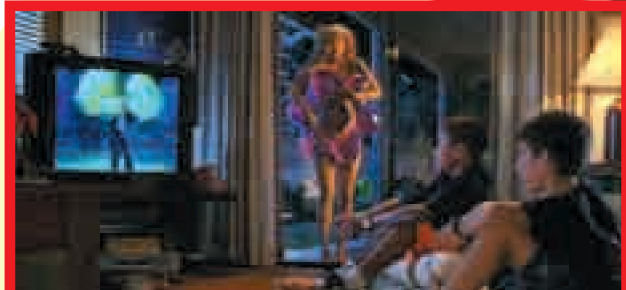
Squall Leonhart's brief appearance in *Charlie's Angels* was perfect proof that no matter how many people are working on a film, simple mistakes can still get easily overlooked (and spotted by people like us who play too many games). Picture the scene: a naked Dylan Sanders (Drew Barrymore) has just been shot through a window and is tumbling down a steep hillside into someone's back yard. Meanwhile, two kids, who are totally oblivious to Dylan's rather abrupt entrance, are discussing girls' boobies while playing Square's excellent *Final Fantasy VIII*. Perfectly innocent until you realise that one of the muppets is hammering the joypad like a button-mashing *Tekken* fan, instead of the RPG he's actually supposed to be playing. We know it's a combat scene, but talk about getting carried away…

And don't even get us started about the other kid who's playing with him. Despite the fact that *Final Fantasy VIII* was a single-player experience the last time we played it, muppet number two is playing alongside muppet one (at a more leisurely pace we might add) as if it's the most natural thing in the world – all the while arguing the fact that his mate has never actually seen any boobies.

As a result of this astonishing gaming faux pas, the scene's payoff line of a naked Dylan approaching the two speechless lads in her birthday suit was completely lost on us. Note to McG – next time you feature a computer game in one of your films, let whoever's on screen play it properly.



▼ Even a naked Drew Barrymore can't distract us from this spectacular gaming howler.



Greatest RETRO Game Ever





T•H•E F•O•O•L•S E•R•R•A•N•D

A RIDDLE WRAPPED IN A MYSTERY INSIDE AN ENIGMA – THEY SURE DON'T MAKE PUZZLE GAMES LIKE THEY USED TO…

Title: **Macintosh (first), PC, Amiga, Atari ST**
Format: **Miles Computing**
Release: **1987 (Mac), 1989 (PC), 1990 (Amiga/Atari ST)**
Developer: **Cliff Johnson (Mac), Manley Associates (conversions)**
Price: **£49.99**

Despite puzzle games playing a key part in the evolution of videogames, very few of them become revered by nearly everyone who plays them. But if you were to look up *The Fool's Errand* on any internet search engine, you'd find words like 'classic', 'timeless' and 'enchanting' coming up over and over, and if you've ever played the game, you'll agree that it's no coincidence.

Originally conceived as a counterpoint to *Masquerade* – the 1979 treasure-hunt book of puzzles whose answers revealed the location of a £30,000 golden hare buried somewhere in the UK – *The Fool's Errand* evolved from a simple pen-and-paper puzzle into a game of mind-bending proportions. It was, in fact, the first videogame metapuzzle: a collection of puzzles that, when solved, gave a piece of the master puzzle. But that makes it sound simpler than it really was…

With only a blank grid, a handful of map segments and a selection of puzzles to get you started, the sense of security offered by the game's opening was deceptive – the more puzzles you solved, the more complicated things became. Each puzzle was linked to a chapter of the story (telling of the Fool's quest) and also to a piece of the game map. As most of the puzzles, chapters and map pieces were missing, you had to crack the ones available to reveal more.

This then created the problem of having to piece together the story and placing the map pieces in the right positions on the grid; not easy, considering there was only one way to match them up. Even if you did manage to complete all 81 puzzles, it wasn't over; you still had to tackle the final 'mother of all puzzles' consisting of 14 even tougher puzzles.

To call the game obscenely addictive would be an understatement – especially since people often approach its creator, Cliff Johnson, to tell him how much they hate him for his contribution to failed exams, missed work and even ruined honeymoons. Nevertheless, it's a game that deserves its place in history simply because it still has as much appeal now as it did in 1987.

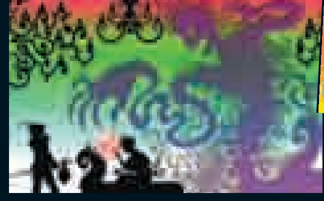
"Because *The Fool's Errand* was a puzzle for its own sake," says Johnson, "I was free to create a straightforward, no-red-herrings, unambiguous picture-and-puzzle adventure. It was easy to get it published, but it languished on the shelf until *MacUser* magazine praised it eight months later. Then all the other magazines reviewed it, the game was translated to MS-DOS, Electronic Arts took over the distribution, and I could finally pay off $50,000 in credit card debt that I spent to create it."

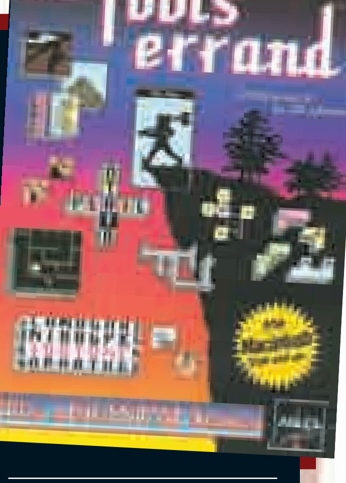
Of course, the best thing about *The Fool's Errand* is that it's still available. Visit the official website (www.fools-errand.com) and you can download it free of charge. For the hours of fun it will provide, we'd call that a bargain.

Fools Never Learn

If you've never had your brain scrambled by *The Fool's Errand*, then now is the perfect time to do so – mainly because the sequel (available to pre-order from fools-errand.com) is due out on April Fool's Day, 2004. *The Fool And His Money* promises even more addictive puzzle play than its predecessor, but in this graphic-hungry age can it really do well enough to consider itself a success? "People play my games for my authorship and imagination," says Johnson, "the tall tale, the unique art direction, and enough 'ah-ha!' to keep 'em grinning ear-to-ear. Like *Field Of Dreams*, I trust that if I build it, they will come."







▲ If you thought *The Fool's Errand* was tricky, wait until your try *The Fool And His Money*.

LOOK BACK IN ANGER

It might have looked lovely but Dragon's Lair was a nightmare to play. And that really isn't the best way to make a classic game…

Had you been loitering around arcades back in 1983, you'd have seen an astonishing-looking game called *Dragon's Lair*. Grabbing some change from the kiosk, you'd immediately rush over to the machine, shovel in all your cash and quickly realise why no one else was playing it…

Dragon's Lair's incredibly cartoon-like visuals (created by ex-Disney animator Don Bluth) came with a very high price – gameplay. Due to the game using a laser disc instead of the more traditional PCB board, the actual gameplay was incredibly restrictive. *Dragon's Lair* consisted of a series of episodes, each of which involved you making a quick decision by pressing the joystick in one of four directions. Make the right choice and you'd watch hero Dirk successfully negotiate his way through a short cartoon; fail and you'd be privy to one of his many different animated death scenes.



Sure, you may have been given a fair few lives with which to test out the trial and error gameplay, but after seeing Dirk crumble into a pile of bones for what seemed like the hundredth time, you soon realised that *Dragon's Lair* was simply fool's gold.

Still, there were plenty of masochists out there who did enjoy it and, as a result, *Dragon's Lair II: Time Warp* was released in 1991. Gameplay (if you could really call it that) had made no progress whatsoever and even a new version of the original game – that included several missing screens – entitled *Dragon's Lair: Escape From Singe's Castle*, did little to hide the sheer hollowness you felt when playing this appalling (though undeniably technically important) piece of gaming history.

▲ Great graphics, blahblah, new technology, yaddayadda… who cares? This was terrible.



HAVEN'T WE MET BEFORE?

ALUNDRA AND THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

Developers borrow (well, steal) ideas from games all the time; titles often appear that are a blatant imitation of a previous, often superior product (especially if said product sold exceptionally well). Every now and then, however, a new title appears that not only uncannily matches a previous game, but is sometimes just as good – *Alundra* is one such title.

When it first appeared on the PlayStation in 1998, *Alundra* entranced gamers with its traditional, beautifully drawn 2D sprites; an engaging story (Alundra could walk into people's dreams); and its simple yet effective real-time combat. Despite its fresh look, which was a world away from the countless 3D RPGs already available on the system, older gamers knew that they'd seen all this somewhere before.

Even a cursory glance at the visuals was enough to convince 16-bit gamers that *Alundra* shared more than a few graphical similarities with the SNES's excellent *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past*. Upon sitting down with *Alundra* it was clear that Working Designs (creators of the superb *Land Stalker*) had not only created a title that could well have been a continuation of the *Zelda* franchise (had it shared the same licence), but one that occasionally improved on its 16-bit peer.

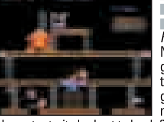
The inclusion of a jump button added a further perspective to the many (often hard) puzzles found throughout the game, but it was the story that really made *Alundra* feel like a step up from Link's SNES adventure. Epic and sweeping, it was a world away from the twee and rather flimsy story of *A Link To The Past* – although it, in turn, was superseded later in the year by Link's N64 debut, *The Legend Of Zelda: The Ocarina Of Time*. Still, it was a superb imitation for those that could find it and was only ruined by its diabolical sequel; but we'll leave that for another day…



▲ These pictures are a perfect example of the similarities between these two titles; it's just a shame Contrail didn't copy *Ocarina Of Time* for the sequel…

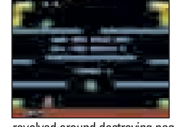
MARIO FAMILY TREE

DONKEY KONG



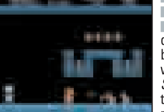
- Arcade
- 1981
- Although *Donkey Kong* starred Nintendo's famous gorilla, the hero of this classic action game was a little man named Mario. His character traits had yet to be defined, but visually he was already the Mario we grew to know and love.

MARIO BROTHERS



- Arcade
- 1983
- Returning just two years after *Donkey Kong*, Mario's second outing hinted at what was to come. Simple by today's standards, the game revolved around destroying pests that emerged from big green pipes.

SUPER MARIO BROTHERS




- NES
- 1985
- With sublime level designs and balanced gameplay, it wasn't surprising that *Super Mario Bros.* turned out to be a massive hit. Even today, this polished little title still stands up against more advanced examples of the platform genre.

SUPER MARIO LAND

- Game Boy
- 1989
- Although this lacked much of the precision of the NES game, *Super Mario Land* was a superb demonstration of what Nintendo's new handheld format was capable of. A decent enough start, though the sequels were better.

DR. MARIO

- GB/NES/SNES/N64
- 1990
- With *Tetris* being such an enormous success on the Game Boy and NES, it perhaps wasn't surprising that Nintendo would at some point take the formula and inject a bit of Mario into it. Multiple versions were released.

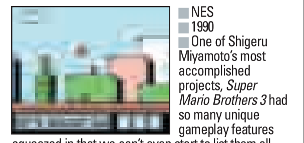
SUPER MARIO BROTHERS 2/THE LOST LEVELS

- NES
- 1986
- *Super Mario Brothers 2* was released in Japan a year after the original *Super Mario* game. Essentially more of the same, it was later packaged with *Super Mario All-Stars* and renamed *Super Mario Brothers: The Lost Levels*.

SUPER MARIO BROTHERS 2/USA

- NES
- 1988
- Originally released in Japan under the name of *Doki Doki Panic*, *Super Mario Brothers 2* was actually a completely separate game into which Nintendo's characters were inserted. Players could play as Mario, Luigi, Princess Toadstool or Toad.

SUPER MARIO BROTHERS 3



- NES
- 1990
- One of Shigeru Miyamoto's most accomplished projects, *Super Mario Brothers 3* had so many unique gameplay features squeezed in that we can't even start to list them all here. It also used a map to link the levels together.

SUPER MARIO LAND 2: 6 GOLDEN COINS



- Game Boy
- 1992
- With bigger sprites, more detail and improved gameplay, *6 Golden Coins* was a far more accurate representation of the *Mario* series than the original Game Boy offering had been back in 1989.

YOSHI'S COOKIE



- GB/NES/SNES
- 1992/93
- Again based around a *Tetris*-like core, *Yoshi's Cookie* was yet another example of Nintendo inserting its characters into different genres. Not as playable as *Tetris*, this was merely an okay game for Yoshi fans.

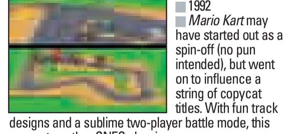
MARIO PAINT

- SNES
- 1992
- Packaged with a mouse, *Mario Paint* offered SNES owners a basic art and music program. Judging by its front end, you'd think this was aimed at younger players, though some of the functions were rather more complex.

SUPER MARIO WORLD

- SNES
- 1991
- The pinnacle of the *Mario* series, *Super Mario World* took the classic gameplay of its predecessors and reworked it with a clean, fresh art style and Super Nintendo special effects. Even *Mario 64* couldn't better this.

SUPER MARIO KART



- SNES
- 1992
- *Mario Kart* may have started out as a spin-off (no pun intended), but went on to influence a string of copycat titles. With fun track designs and a sublime two-player battle mode, this was yet another SNES classic.

SUPER MARIO LAND 3: WARIOLAND

- Game Boy
- 1993
- Continuing Mario's Game Boy adventures, *Mario Land 3* was a little different in that it actually starred Wario. With many new gameplay innovations and fabulous graphics, this was a superb little game.

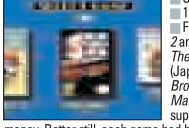
MARIO & WARIO

- SNES
- 1993
- One of Mario's less well-known adventures, *Mario & Wario* is a puzzle game in which the player needed to guide Mario, Yoshi or Princess Toadstool to safety using a fairy with a magic wand. Playable, but nothing special.

YOSHI'S SAFARI

- SNES
- 1993
- It's no real secret that the SNES Super Scope was a bit of a flop, mainly due to a lack of decent software. Even this very lovely-looking Mode 7 Yoshi title couldn't save such a pointless piece of grey plastic.

SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS



- SNES
- 1993
- Featuring Marios *1*, *2* and *3*, as well as *The Lost Levels* (Japan's *Super Mario Brothers 2*), *Super Mario All-Stars* was superb value for money. Better still, each game had been upgraded with SNES-quality visuals.

WARIO'S WOODS

- NES/SNES
- 1994
- Yet another *Tetris*-inspired Nintendo game, this time starring Wario, as well as a handful of other familiar faces. The aim here was to group different blocks together, before destroying them with falling bombs.

YOSHI'S OVEN

- SNES
- 1994
- A basic adventure game, the main premise of *Yoshi's Oven* was simply to explore the isometric worlds collecting each of the ingredients to bake cookies. Once located, the items were blended and put into, that's right, Yoshi's oven.

MARIO'S TIME MACHINE/MARIO IS MISSING

- NES/SNES/PC
- 1993
- Two edutainment titles developed by Microprose, these adventures took children around the world and through time. They're among a small selection of non-Nintendo Mario games, not all of which are included here.

MARIO'S EARLY YEARS



- SNES
- 1993
- Obviously aimed at the younger audience, these three titles were broken down into different themes – Fun With Letters, Fun With Numbers, and Pre-School. It was basically *Sesame Street* for Mario fans.

MARIO'S SUPER PICROSS

- Game Boy/SNES
- 1995
- In case you've never heard of *Picross* before, it's basically a puzzle game in which the player must draw a specified number of pictures into squares across a grid. This was, as you'd expect, a version featuring Mario.

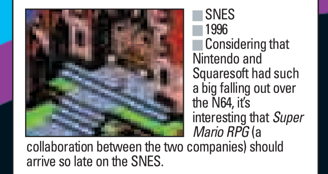
SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND

- SNES
- 1995
- Using the Argonaut/Nintendo-developed Super FX chip, *Yoshi's Island* was one of the last great SNES games. With lush, hand-drawn visuals and some of the best level designs ever created, this is what Nintendo was once about.

MARIO EXCITE BIKE

- SNES
- 1996
- Only available in Japan via the Bandai Satellaview, *Mario Excite Bike* was an update of the classic NES game, featuring improved visuals and Nintendo's ever-growing cast of Mario characters. Great, for those who could get it.

SUPER MARIO RPG



- SNES
- 1996
- Considering that Nintendo and Squaresoft had such a big falling out over the N64, it's interesting that *Super Mario RPG* (a collaboration between the two companies) should arrive so late on the SNES.

WARIO LAND 2



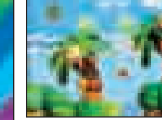
- GB/ GBC
- 1998
- Now far more established as a character, Wario's second Game Boy adventure proved to be even better than the first. Interestingly, it was impossible to die, although you could get stuck in a dead end because the puzzles were tricky.

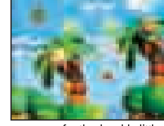
MARIO'S PICROSS 2



- Game Boy
- 1996
- Although *Picross* has never been that big over here, somebody somewhere must love it because Nintendo has developed loads of these titles over the years. This was essentially more of the same as in the first game.

YOSHI'S STORY





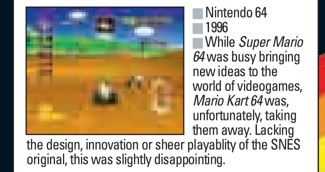
- Nintendo 64
- 1997
- Many were disappointed with *Yoshi's Story* – it was shorter and far less innovative than its predecessor on the SNES. Even so, this was a perfectly playable little game with some of the cutesiest 2D visuals ever created.

SUPER MARIO 64



- Nintendo 64
- 1996
- As the grandaddy of 3D platform games, *Mario 64* brought so many new rules to videogames that it's still hard to comprehend them all even today. It's debatable whether or not it has ever been bettered.

MARIO KART 64



- Nintendo 64
- 1996
- While *Super Mario 64* was busy bringing new ideas to the world of videogames, *Mario Kart 64* was, unfortunately, taking them away. Lacking the design, innovation or sheer playability of the SNES original, this was slightly disappointing.

SUPER MARIO DX

- Game Boy Color
- 1999
- If you were looking for a reason to buy a Game Boy Color, this was it. Based on the original *Super Mario Brothers,* this was infinitely playable in handheld format, and even included Japan's *Super Mario Brothers 2* as a bonus.

SUPER SMASH BROTHERS



- Nintendo 64
- 1999
- It's no secret that *Super Smash Brothers* was lacking in the gameplay department, especially compared to other similar fighting games. But with Pikachu included along with the Mario Brothers, this was always going to do well.

MARIO GOLF

- GBC/Nintendo 64
- 1999
- It's perhaps not surprising that people see Nintendo as being for younger gamers when even its best sports games are built around Mario. Of course, this wasn't Mario's first game of golf, as Game Boy owners may well remember.

MARIO PARTY

- Nintendo 64
- 1999
- While SEGA was struggling to get the Dreamcast off the ground with games like *Virtua Fighter 3* and *SEGA Rally 2,* Nintendo was reminding gamers what fun is all about with *Mario Party.* Simple? Certainly, but nicely executed.

WARIO LAND 3

- Game Boy Color
- 2000
- Very much like its predecessor, *Wario Land 3* again demonstrated Nintendo's ability to create sublime level designs and innovative puzzles. This was structured so you had to play through more than once to get everything.

MARIO TENNIS

- GBC/Nintendo 64
- 2001
- As far as tennis games go, this was actually one of the better ones. Unfortunately, while the inclusion of Mario may have pleased fans, for other gamers it hammered home the fact that Nintendo games seemed to be aimed at kids.

MARIO PARTY 2

- Nintendo 64
- 2001
- The *Mario Party* series is always a great card to play in arguments about Nintendo's recent lack of innovation in games. While the first game was certainly something a bit different, this was more of the same multiplayer tomfoolery.

PAPER MARIO

- Nintendo 64
- 2001
- As one of the last big games for the Nintendo 64, it isn't really any surprise that hardly anyone ever played this. A pseudo follow-up to *Super Mario RPG,* this looked a little like an edutainment title for three-year-olds.

MARIO KART: SUPER CIRCUIT



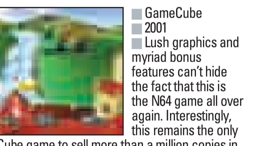
- GBA
- 2001
- Sitting somewhere between SNES *Super Mario Kart* and *Mario Kart 64,* this helped to shift GBA hardware. Sadly, being somewhere between the SNES and N64, it still didn't manage to better the original game.

WARIO LAND 4



- GBA
- 2001
- The first three *Wario Land* games were, in fact, better than most of the Mario offerings in recent years. Sadly, while this retains the overall quality we've come to expect, it's by far the shortest game in the series.

SUPER SMASH BROTHERS MELEE



- GameCube
- 2001
- Lush graphics and myriad bonus features can't hide the fact that this is the N64 game all over again. Interestingly, this remains the only GameCube game to sell more than a million copies in Japan. Pokémon, anyone?

MARIO PARTY 3

- Nintendo 64
- 2001
- Are you getting bored of this yet? There really isn't a whole lot more to be said about *Mario Party,* except that it's great fun for all the family, providing you have four pads, an N64, a copy of the game…

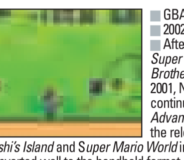
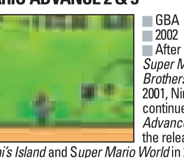
LUIGI'S MANSION

- GameCube
- 2001
- If you ever want proof that Nintendo has lost some of its magic recently then have a go at this. It's not awful, but it's hardly the sort of polished adventure game you'd expect at a Nintendo hardware launch.

MARIO ADVANCE

- GBA
- 2001
- With all the those Mario games in its back catalogue, it's interesting that Nintendo should choose *Super Mario Brothers 2* for release first on the GBA. Great as it looks, this tends to be a real case of love it or hate it.

MARIO ADVANCE 2 & 3

- GBA
- 2002
- After releasing *Super Mario Brothers 2* for GBA in 2001, Nintendo continued the *Advance* theme with the releases of *Yoshi's Island* and *Super Mario World* in 2002. Both converted well to the handheld format.

MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR

- GameCube
- 2003
- We gave it 8/10 a few issues back, and there's no denying that this was actually a really decent little golf game. A GBA version, entitled *Mario Golf: Advance Tour,* is also due for release next year with link-up options between the two games.

MARIO PARTY 4

- GameCube
- 2002
- So, here we are again. Aside from nicer graphics and better sound, there was really very little to separate this from the N64 games. Ever playable, many gamers still rushed out to buy a copy of this at full price.

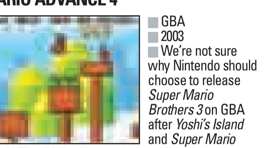
SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE

- GameCube
- 2002
- After the disappointment that was *Luigi's Mansion,* this really needed to be something special if it were to reassure gamers that Nintendo still had that magic. Unfortunately, this couldn't better *Mario 64.*

MARIO & LUIGI: SUPERSTAR SAGA

- GBA
- 2003
- Similar in style to *Paper Mario* on N64, it will be interesting to see how Mario's first original Game Boy Advance title will compare to older titles in the series. If the artwork is anything to go by, we're not expecting too much.

MARIO ADVANCE 4

- GBA
- 2003
- We're not sure why Nintendo should choose to release *Super Mario Brothers 3* on GBA after *Yoshi's Island* and *Super Mario World.* Thankfully, this stands up well to the newer games thanks to its top gameplay.

MARIO TENNIS

- GameCube/GBA
- 2001
- We haven't heard anything about this since its initial unveiling, though we're expecting great things if its predecessor is anything to go by. Watch out for updates on this over the coming months.

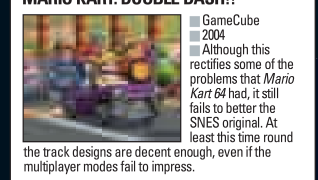
MARIO PARTY 5

- GameCube
- 2003
- *Mario Party 5* looks set to offer fans of the series even more of the same. If you've got three friends and three controllers handy then you'll no doubt have great fun. Hang on, didn't we say that about all the other *Mario Party* titles?

PAPER MARIO GC/SUPER MARIO 128

- GameCube
- 2004
- Although there are no firm details of either of these titles yet, we're excited to find out what Nintendo has planned for us next. Hopefully at least one of these two games will offer a little more ingenuity than *Sunshine* did…

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!



- GameCube
- 2004
- Although this rectifies some of the problems that *Mario Kart 64* had, it still fails to better the SNES original. At least this time round the track designs are decent enough, even if the multiplayer modes fail to impress.

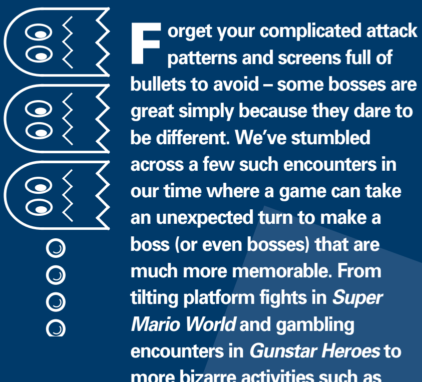
GREAT GAME BOSSES





ALEX KIDD IN MIRACLE WORLD - JANKEN MATCHES

SOMETIMES THE OLD IDEAS ARE THE BEST, AND THEY DON'T GET MUCH OLDER THAN THIS

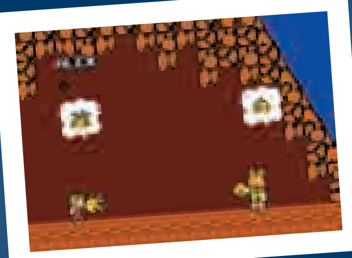


Forget your complicated attack patterns and screens full of bullets to avoid – some bosses are great simply because they dare to be different. We've stumbled across a few such encounters in our time where a game can take an unexpected turn to make a boss (or even bosses) that are much more memorable. From tilting platform fights in *Super Mario World* and gambling encounters in *Gunstar Heroes* to more bizarre activities such as *Earthworm Jim 3D*'s pig-riding boss battles (apologies for reminding you of these monstrosities) and *Contra*'s Mode 7 frivolity, there are some classic moments out there just waiting to be relived. In technical terms, this encounter from *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* is not one of them. But if you want a reminder of just how quirky games can be, step this way please…

'Janken Matches' is basically a fancy term for 'Paper, Scissors, Stone', which as any gamer will tell you is hardly the most skilful way to buy your passage to the next level. The name is derived from the game's main boss, who, for whatever reason, has hired henchmen with heads modelled after the three elements of the game. We're still trying to work out whether the battle of wits was decided upon based on said odd-shaped noggins or if they're one of nature's crueller coincidences, but either way, what must be racing through a developer's head to decide that an entire level's worth of hard graft should be undermined by a game of chance?

Perhaps the worst thing about these encounters, though, is the fact that they're nowhere near as random as they first seem. Provided you stick to a certain pattern through the course of the game, you'll never lose a single encounter – make one mistake anywhere along the way and the patterns are thrown into disarray.

At around this time, there's usually a loudmouthed and outspoken minority who speak out about the skill and tactics involved in a game of Paper, Scissors, Stone. Sure, in the real world there is something to be said for the psychological side of the game, but this is nigh-on impossible to replicate with blocky 8-bit characters. They don't make 'em like this anymore…









Beat It!

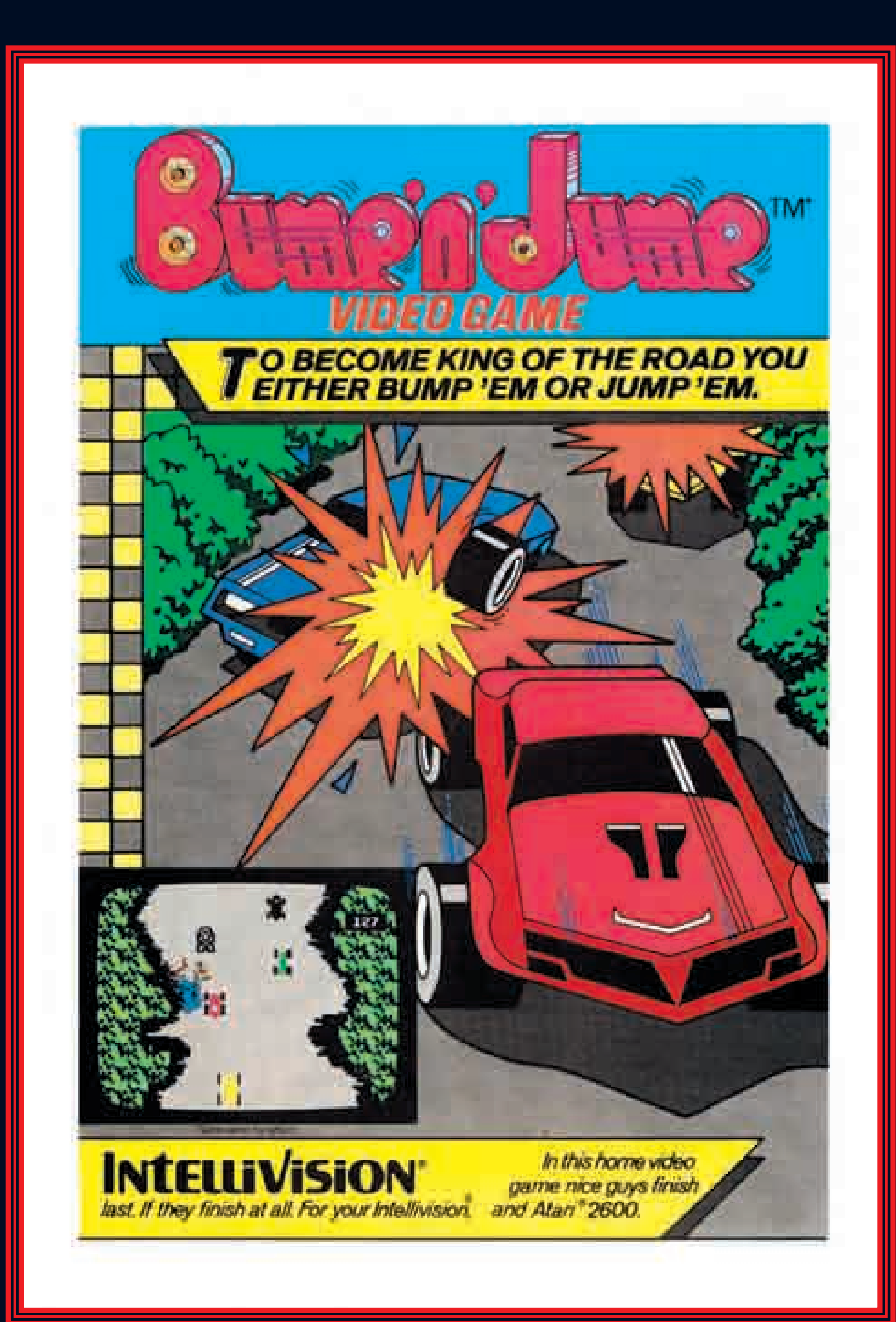
That list of winning Janken combinations in full…

1st: Rock, Scissors
2nd: Scissors, Paper
3rd: Rock, Scissors
4th: Paper, Paper
5th: Rock, Rock
6th: Rock, Scissors
7th: Paper, Paper

LAST MONTH'S N64 SCREENSHOTS

It might be one of the more modern retro consoles, but could you remember all those games?

FIRST ROW	SECOND ROW	THIRD ROW	FOURTH ROW	FIFTH ROW	SIXTH ROW	SEVENTH ROW	EIGHTH ROW
Mario Party 2	Diddy Kong Racing	Nightmare Creatures	Road Rash 64	Mario Tennis	Bust-A-Move 2: Arcade Edition	Top Gear Rally	International Superstar Soccer 64
Star Wars: Shadows Of The Empire	Tetris 64	Gauntlet Legends	Snowboard Kids	Perfect Dark	Banjo Kazooie	WipEout 64	Aero Gauge
ECW Hardcore Revolution	Ridge Racer 64	Paper Mario	SCARS	Wave Race 64	Mario 64	Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey	All-Star Tennis
DDR: Disney Dance Museum	Silicon Valley	Rocket Robot On Wheels	Sin & Punishment	The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time	Offroad	Cruisn' USA	Bass Hunter 64
Pokémon Stadium	The Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask	Super Smash Brothers	F-Zero X	Quest 64	Castlevania 64	Banjo-Tooie	Donkey Kong 64
Lylat Wars	Kirby 64: The Crystal Shards	Roadsters	F1 Pole Position	Hybrid Heaven	Yoshi's Story	Hydro Thunder	Pokémon Snap
Extreme G	Destruction Derby 64	Hexen 64	A Bug's Life	F-1 World Grand Prix	Blast Corps	Bomberman 64	Conker's Bad Fur Day
World Driver Championship	Earthworm Jim 3D	San Francisco Rush	Duck Dodgers	Mortal Kombat Trilogy	Mario Kart 64	Monster Truck Madness 64	Jet Force Gemini
All-Star Baseball '99	Star Wars: The Battle For Naboo	Mario Golf	Mario Party 3	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2	Micro Machines 64	PilotWings 64	Harvest Moon 64
Beetle Adventure Racing	GoldenEye 007	Automobili Lamborghini	Bio Freaks	1080° Snowboarding	Cruisn' World	Magical Tetris: Starring Mickey Mouse	Excite Bike 64



Bump 'n' Jump (Intellivision, Atari 2600) Mattel, 1983 – UK advertisement



SPECIFICATIONS

CPU: Custom 8-bit HuC6280
CPU SPEED: 7.16MHz
GPU: Custom 8-bit HuC6270
MEMORY: 8Kbyte RAM
64Kbyte VRAM
RESOLUTION: 256x216
GRAPHICS: 512 Colours
64 Sprites
(32x64 max size)
SOUND: Six-channel stereo
STORAGE: HuCard – up to 20 Megabit
INPUT/OUTPUT: HuCard slot, single controller port, 69-pin external bus connector, RF

PC Engine

Why are the greats always overlooked? Despite massive success in Japan, the PC Engine never really made it in Europe. But this neat little console remains a firm favourite with hardcore Western gamers

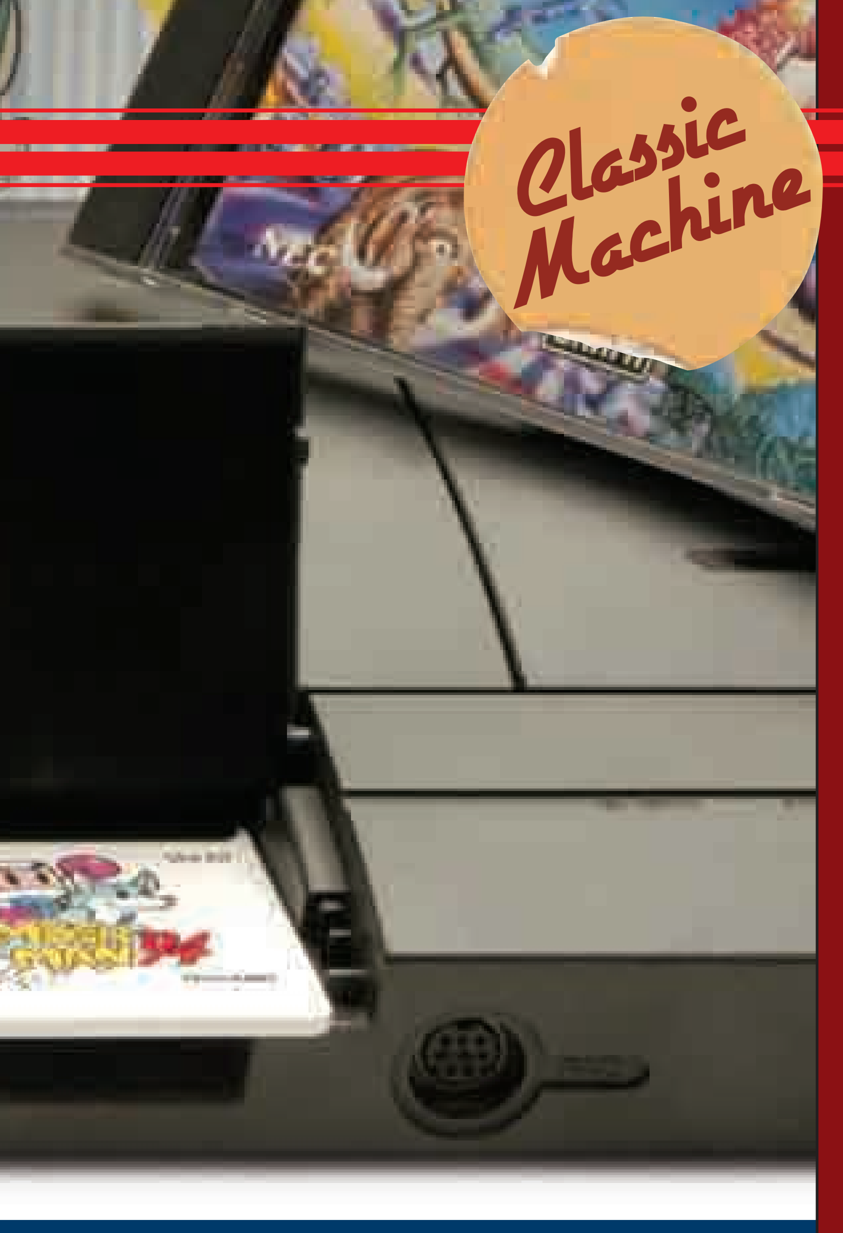
"Why I love my PC Engine"

There I was, flicking through *C+VG*, when I saw a sight that took my breath away – the first screenshots of *R-Type* on the PC Engine, and it looked amazing. I was dismayed to find out how much this console would cost, but I knew how popular it would make me with friends so a purchase was inevitable. I may not have the same friends that I had 14 years ago, but I still have the console.

Darran Jones

The PC Engine was released in Japan in October 1987 – exactly a year before SEGA's 16-bit Mega Drive. Developed as a joint project between NEC and Hudson, the system featured an 8-bit processor at its core and was initially priced at just ¥24,800 (£133). As underwhelming as its 8-bit architecture may seem, the system was surprisingly powerful due to numerous other chips that boosted its capabilities, and the fact that the main processor ran at a healthy 7.12MHz. The system was certainly comparable to the Mega Drive, while some of the better-looking games could easily be confused with SNES titles.

Technology aside, it was the sheer number of quality releases that attracted Japanese gamers. Among the first generation of PC Engine games were translations of



Classic Machine

R-Type, *Fantasy Zone* and *Space Harrier*, while original titles like *Bonk*, *Blazing Lasers* and *Devil Crash* proved that the console wasn't just a one-trick pony. Even today, the system is home to some of the best shoot-'em-ups ever created.

Unfortunately, the simplistic design of the console meant that a multi-tap was required for any multiplayer games. Similarly, with only RF out, anyone wishing to improve their picture quality needed to buy an AV booster (although this issue was addressed with some of the later models).

The PC Engine was the first console to receive a CD-Rom add-on. Launched in 1988, the PC Engine CD-Rom was linked to the main console by a unit that incorporated back-up RAM storage and AV out. The drive was only single speed, though it was still unquestionably impressive back then. Also impressive was that the device doubled as a portable CD player – at the time, of course, such things were still relatively new. Even with a price tag of ¥57,300 (£307), the system was well received by gamers – most probably because of the strong support from third-party developers.

A further upgrade in the form of the Super CD-Rom2 (which quadrupled the size of the RAM buffer) resulted in the release of even more quality titles. In fact, Konami's *Dracula X: Circle Of Blood* (*Castlevania*) remains one of the most sought-after PC Engine titles, despite the fact that it was only ever available on CD.

The PC Engine was also released in America in 1989 under the name of the TurboGrafx-16, though it never achieved the same level of success there as it did in Japan.

So Many Models

Even hardcore gamers get confused by the many PC Engine variations. Here's a complete list of models…



- MACHINE: PC Engine
- RELEASED: 1987
- PRICE: ¥24,800 (£133)

At approximately 14 x 14cm, the standard white PC Engine has to be one of the most compact consoles ever released. The system featured only one controller port.

- MACHINE: PC Engine CD-Rom
- RELEASED: 1988
- PRICE: ¥57,300 (£307)

One of the most successful CD-Rom add-ons ever released, this linked with the PC Engine and offered developers additional memory to create potentially bigger and better games.

- MACHINE: PC Engine CoreGrafx
- RELEASED: 1990
- PRICE: ¥24,800 (£133)

Aside from coming in a stylish black finish and offering AV out, instead of RF, the CoreGrafx was essentially exactly the same as the original console released in '87.

- MACHINE: PC Engine Shuttle
- RELEASED: 1990
- PRICE: ¥18,800 (£101)

With the 69-pin external connector removed, NEC could afford to sell this model at a reduced price. Why they decided it should look like a space shuttle is another matter entirely.

- MACHINE: PC Engine Super Grafx
- RELEASED: 1990
- PRICE: ¥39,800 (£213)

This model came with additional VRAM and two extra graphics processors. Unfortunately, a lack of decent games, coupled with the high price, meant this wasn't as popular.

- MACHINE: PC Engine GT
- RELEASED: 1990
- PRICE: ¥44,800 (£240)

The GT was a portable version of the PC Engine that featured a high-quality LCD screen and played all existing HuCard games. A TV tuner was also available.

- MACHINE: PC Engine Duo
- RELEASED: 1991
- PRICE: ¥59,800 (£320)

A PC Engine and the new Super CD-Rom2 drive together. Existing owners could buy the SCD-Rom 2 drive as a standalone unit or in the form of an upgrade card for the PC Engine CD-Rom.

- MACHINE: CoreGrafx 2
- RELEASED: 1991
- PRICE: ¥19,800 (£106)

Essentially the same as the original CoreGrafx, this was simply a cheaper re-release that came in a stylish grey finish to match the new Super CD-Rom2 add-on.

- MACHINE: PC Engine LT
- RELEASED: 1991
- PRICE: ¥99,800 (£535)

A handheld with a massive four-inch screen, the LT (short for Lap Top) also doubled as a portable TV and was fully compatible with the Super CD-Rom2 add-on.

- MACHINE: PC Engine Duo-R
- RELEASED: 1993
- PRICE: ¥29,800 (£160)

This was virtually the same as the standard Duo released two years previously. A couple of lesser features had been removed and the design was white and slightly more rounded.

- MACHINE: PC Engine Duo-RX
- RELEASED: 1994
- PRICE: ¥29,800 (£160)

Exactly the same as the standard Duo-R, the only difference here was the control pad. Until now, PC Engine pads featured just two buttons, but now there were six.



The PC Engine Duo-R combined the original machine and the CD-Rom add-on in one package.

PC Engine







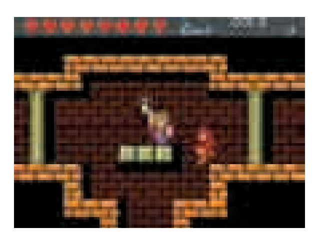
Six of the Best

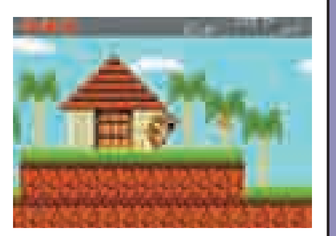
Despite its limited release, NEC's PC Engine has some of the best games (particularly shoot-'em-ups) ever seen on a home console

ADVENTURE ISLAND

Publisher: **Hudson Soft**
Year: **1991**

Not to be confused with *Super Adventure Island*, this was essentially the Master System's *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap* with updated graphics and sound. Beginning your quest at the end of *Wonder Boy In Monster Land*, a cruel trick turns you into a fire-breathing dragon, and before your adventure is completed you'll transform into a variety of animal hybrids – including Mouse Man and Lion Man – in order to explore Monster Land. With interesting puzzles and some absorbing gameplay, this is worth picking up.

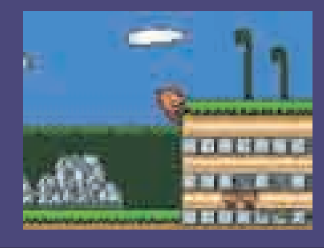


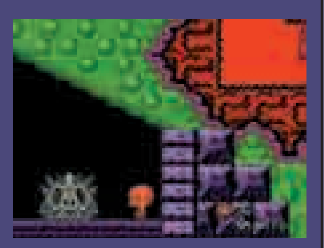


PC KID

Publisher: **Hudson Soft/Red**
Year: **1989**

As far as PC Engine owners were concerned, PC Kid (or Bonk as he was known in America) was the only platform hero worth worrying about. PC Kid may have had a rather oversized noggin, but it came in extremely useful when it came to head-butting the various enemies he encountered. Set in prehistoric times, *PC Kid* featured smart, cartoony visuals, classic tunes and some massive dinosaur bosses. Two sequels and a shoot-'em-up followed, but the original is still the best.





R-TYPE

Publisher: **Hudson Soft/Irem**
Year: **1988**

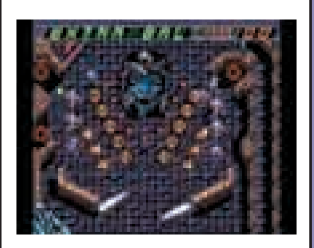
If there was one title that convinced gamers that the PC Engine was worth their hard-earned cash, it was the stunning conversion of arcade classic *R-Type*. Originally spread over two HuCards (it was later re-released complete on CD), *R-Type* looked simply amazing and was the perfect excuse to convince hardcore gamers to buy NEC's new console. There may have been the odd bit of flicker here and there, but with plenty of atmosphere and blasting action, this was easily the best home version of *R-Type* ever made.



DEVIL CRASH

Publisher: **Naxat**
Year: **1990**

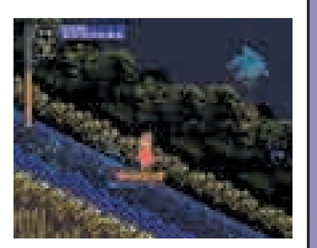
Naxat's sequel to *Alien Crush* proved to be another fantastic pinball game and was yet another high-quality title to add to the PC Engine's ever-growing catalogue. *Devil Crash* may have only had one main table (along with several bonus tables) but it was wonderfully designed and included a whole host of classic pinball features. Featuring a great rock soundtrack, superlative ball physics and some gothic visuals (dungeons and pentagrams included), this is still one of the best examples of the genre.



DRACULA X: CHI NO RONDO

Publisher: **Konami**
Year: **1993**

When NEC's Super CD-Rom was released, *Dracula X* (a jazzed up remake of *Vampire's Kiss*) was a perfect showcase for the PC Engine's new hardware add-on. Featuring seven enormous levels – as well as five hidden ones – the ninth *Castlevania* game is held by many in as high esteem as *Symphony Of The Night*. A limited Japanese-only release, unique visual style (including anime cut-scenes) and some fabulous orchestrated music means that this is easily worth its price tag of around £100 on eBay.

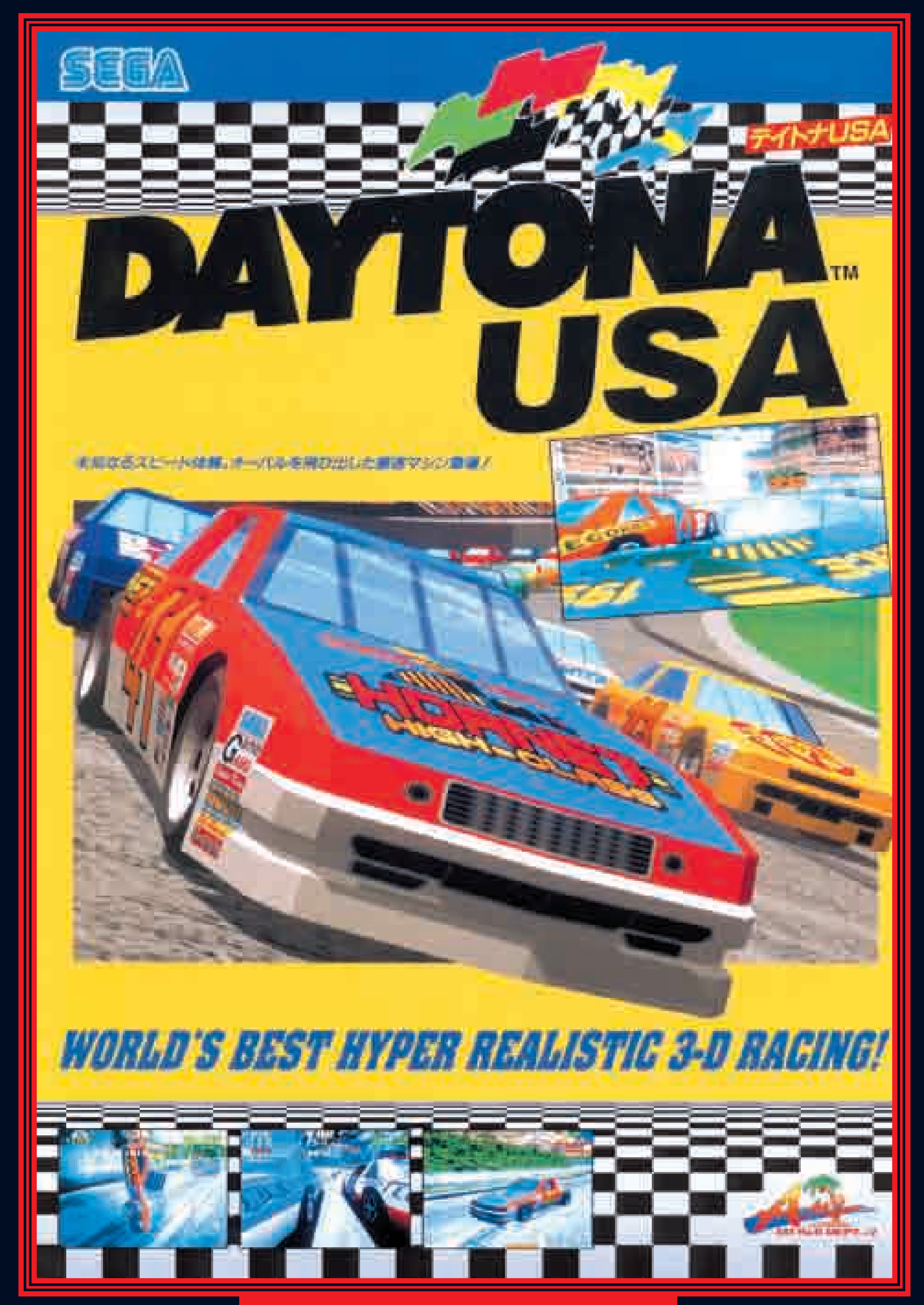


GATES OF THUNDER

Publisher: **Hudson Soft/Red**
Year: **1992**

While the PC Engine was host to a plethora of shoot-'em-ups (including the *Gunhed* series, *Gradius* and *Twin Bee*), *Gates Of Thunder* was something special. Another Super CD release, here was a game that had everything needed to make a quintessential shoot-'em-up. Outrageous visuals, a pounding soundtrack and some superb level design put *Gates Of Thunder* in a league of its own. Very similar in design to the classic *Thunder Force III* on the Mega Drive, it was further proof that the PC Engine was an exceptional machine.





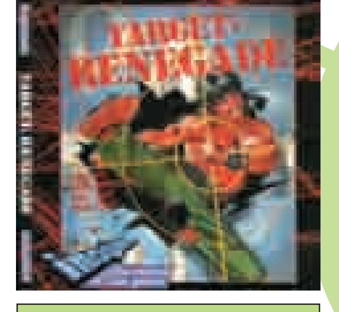
Daytona USA (Model 2 arcade board) SEGA, 1994 – Original arcade flyer

GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT…

TARGET RENEGADE



CLASSIC FIGHTING ACTION FOR ONE OR TWO PLAYERS…



Title: **Target Renegade**
Developer: **Imagine**
Format: **Various Home Systems**
Release date: **1988**

Whenever we dust off our ancient 8-bit computers, or fire up the latest emulator, one of the games we always return to is Imagine's classic *Target Renegade*. When the original *Renegade* first appeared in arcades it proved to be an immediate hit with its easy-to-master controls and over-the-top violence. After *Renegade*'s success, a sequel was inevitable and arcade owners were eventually treated to an unofficial one in the form of *Double Dragon* (if you check closely, you'll see a *Renegade* poster on the first level). Despite *Double Dragon*'s success in the arcades it was poorly ported to a range of machines, so 8-bit gamers needed to find their fighting fixes elsewhere.

Fortunately, Spectrum and Amstrad owners had already been treated to a superb version of *Renegade*, so when Imagine finally announced an official sequel in 1988 gamers were ecstatic. *Target Renegade* took its predecessor's original template and improved on it magnificently. Break the mould? Hell, it threw it away.

Target Renegade's main draw was undoubtedly its fantastic two-player mode; now you could pummel away with a friend to your heart's content. This additional help was a major bonus as the title's cartoony visuals hid a game that was as tough as granite. What a shame then that the C64 version – which was arguably the best of the 8-bit versions in terms of sound and visuals – actually lacked the much-coveted second player. This oversight, however, worked in the CPC-464's favour and it soon became the platform of choice whenever you and your mates felt like bashing a few heads together.

Although the numerous enemies – ranging from vicious bulldogs to the predictable ladies of the night – were stiff competition, there were a number of different weapons available throughout the game's five levels. Baseball bats, pool cues and hammers all dished out huge amounts of damage and seriously improved your chances of getting through a stage unscathed.

Even without a weapon you were more than capable of looking after yourself and you had access to back kicks, punches, flying kicks and the devastating 'knee 'em in the balls' routine. Once your opponent was floored, you were then able to straddle them and continue to lay into the prone body with a series of brutal punches.

Artificial intelligence wasn't exactly a major feature in most beat-'em-ups of old and the AI on display in *Target Renegade* was no different. Once you'd been knocked down on the floor, your attackers would casually stroll to either end of your body and patiently wait for you to get back up. Certain characters would dodge a number of moves (especially your flying kicks), but a good back kick to the head was usually enough to send them packing.

It might not have had the same influence as *Double Dragon*, but *Target Renegade* was still a sterling example of a rapidly growing genre.



▼ Don't worry if you're outnumbered – your enemies will never kick you when you're down.

Three's A Crowd

Keen to continue the success it had found with *Renegade* and *Target Renegade*, Imagine quickly began work on a third title. *Renegade III: The Final Chapter* was an incredibly poor game that captured none of the flair of its predecessors. To add further insult to injury, the game featured a time travel theme, which saw hero Renegade battling dinosaurs, cavemen and aliens. Utterly shambolic.

▲ You want fancy moves? You got 'em. And plenty.



WHAT WENT WRONG?

Daytona USA – Arcade To Saturn

It was great in the arcades, then it came out on the Saturn…



With Namco's PlayStation version of *Ridge Racer* proving that the latest 3D arcade racing games could be ported faithfully, if not perfectly, to home consoles, everyone had great expectations for SEGA's conversion of *Daytona USA* on the Saturn. The arcade version had already been massively popular thanks to its action-packed races and vibrant visuals, though it was always going to be tricky scaling down the code to work on the fledgling machine.

Although the Saturn launched with an atrocious port of *Virtua Fighter* in Japan, SEGA assured the industry that *Daytona* would be nigh-on identical to the arcade game. And for some reason, everyone believed this.

When the game did arrive, it was shocking. The crisp textures had been downgraded to rough, blocky ones that warped whenever they were close to the camera, and the amount of pop-up was laughable. Hardcore fans still insisted that the gameplay was intact, though we'd have to disagree. With stiff, unresponsive controls, and a frame rate so low you might as well have been watching a slideshow, this really was a million miles away from the accomplished Model 2 arcade game.



THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND



Format(s): **Amiga/PC/Mac**
Publisher: **LucasArts**
Developer: **LucasArts**
Release date: **1991**

Instant death – don't you just hate it? The feeling of knowing that oblivion could be just a mouse click away is infuriating, yet it's something that players of adventure games in the early Nineties had to endure. Though some companies were more guilty of it than others, most adventure-style games tended to use the threat of imminent death as part of the puzzle structure.

Thankfully, some games didn't have to resort to that, and one even managed to ridicule those that did. Even though it was obvious from the start that the humour in LucasArts' *Secret Of Monkey Island* was decidedly sly, few people could have predicted the tongue-in-cheek 'death scene' that occurred once you made it to Monkey Island itself (especially since dying in the game was virtually impossible). All it took was one step too close to the edge of the cliff overlooking the island and 'whoops' – the ground gives way and Guybrush plummets to his doom.

Of course, things aren't always what they seem, and after a few seconds Guybrush flies back up onto the clifftop and lands safely on his feet, having fallen on a rubber tree below. This was a poke in the eye to games that took great pleasure in killing you whenever they could. And it was damn funny too…



▼ Gadzooks! That crumbling cliff was unexpected…

▼ But don't hit that Restart key just yet. Who's that?

▼ Good grief, it's you. Don't try this at home. Really.

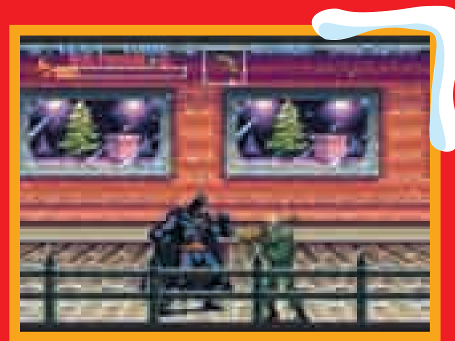
A Very Retro

'Twas the night *before* Christmas and *all* through the house, not a *joystick* was twitching, nor keyboard and mouse... Christmas is the key moment in the gaming calendar, *but* then when hasn't it *been*?

Since electronic gaming first started to become popular, the festive season has always been the time of year that most publishers aim to get their games on the shelves. With cold, frosty weather outside and the kids off school with nothing to do but watch the telly, it's no real surprise that this form of entertainment would be especially appealing during the winter months. In fact, developers are often under a ridiculous amount of pressure to get their creations finished in time – Naughty Dog, for example, lost a number of staff during the development of *Crash Bandicoot 2* due to the enormous number of hours they were having to put in to get Sony's highly anticipated sequel ready in time for Christmas. It's difficult to comprehend just how tough it must be to get such popular franchises out on a one-a-year basis.

However, while games of all kinds get released during the last quarter of the year, a few are specifically designed with Christmas is mind. Recently we've seen titles such as *Santa Claus Saves The Earth* hitting the shelves, though this sort of thing actually goes back as far as the Spectrum days. A Christmas version of *Monty Mole* by Gremlin, entitled *Moley Christmas*, was released as a freebie on the cover of *Your Sinclair* back in 1987 and proved particularly popular. Of course, as a promotional cover game, *Moley Christmas* didn't need to be a full-length product like *Santa Claus Saves The Earth*, putting its









▲ *Christmas Lemmings* is among a handful of popular titles to be dressed up for the festive season. 'Oh no!' and so on.

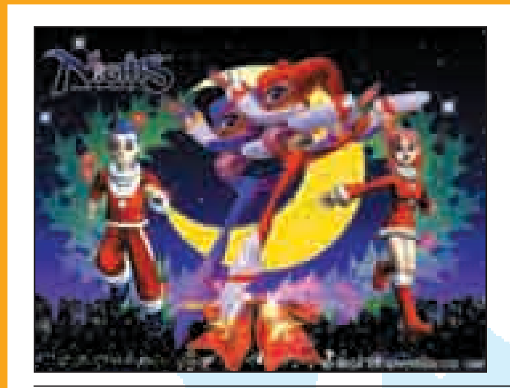
Christmas!

publisher in a far less risky position. Obviously, anything selling at full price would immediately lose its value once the big day had passed.

Rather than putting all their eggs in once basket, some developers feature the festive season in their games, but only as one part of a much greater whole. SEGA's Mega Drive hit *World Of Illusion Starring Mickey And Donald*, for instance, contained a secret Christmas level that was only available if two players were working together in co-op. After jumping into an enormous present, the two heroes had to leap from bauble to bauble over Christmas trees and along stretches of decorative bunting. This was without doubt a lovely extra for younger players during the run-up to 25 December, though the stage was less appealing during the summer months.

In fact, it seems that SEGA truly appreciates the magic of Christmas, as many of its products include bonus features that celebrate the festive season. Just like *Moley Christmas*, a special edition of *NiGHTS: Into Dreams* entitled *Christmas NiGHTS* was given away on the cover of the official Saturn magazine. A nice gift from SEGA, for sure, though some of its other festve promotions were rather more clever. You see, both the Saturn and Dreamcast featured built-in clocks that knew exactly which day of the year it was, and some developers, including SEGA itself, took advantage of this by implementing data that was only available on Christmas day.

▼ Although not strictly a Christmas game, *Cool Boarders* is among a huge list of titles that are best enjoyed during the winter months. Look, it's got snowmen and everything.





▶ *Christmas NiGHTS* was a superb re-release of the classic Saturn title. It was also a great way for SEGA to promote the standard game.

Specifically Seasonal Software

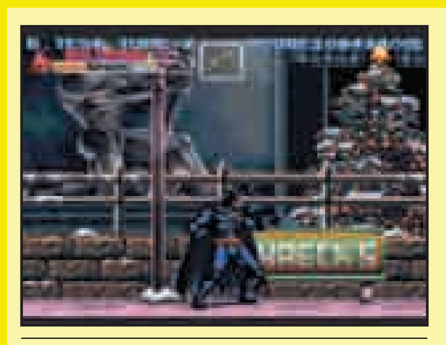
Of all the games developed over the years, a few have been created especially for release at Christmas. *Moley Christmas* for the Spectrum is a great example of how publishers soon realised that the festive season could be used to push products to a wider audience – something that continues to happen today. Just last year in America, Simon & Schuster released *The Nine Holes Of Christmas*, a festive version of *Outlaw Golf*. As fans of the *Outlaw* franchise will be aware, this probably wasn't the ideal game to play with the family after Christmas lunch, though it was certainly very funny.

Of course, between *Moley Christmas* and *Outlaw Golf*, many other festive games have been developed. *Christmas Lemmings*, for instance, brought a novel twist to the world of comedy rodents, while SEGA's *Christmas NiGHTS* has turned out to be something of a collector's item. Given away as a cover promotion with the official Saturn magazine in the UK, this cut-down version of SEGA's classic game was full of Christmas trees, fairy lights and even a suspiciously Robotnik-esque Santa.

A Christmas version of the Dreamcast virtual pet game *Seaman* was released in Japan, along with a limited edition translucent red Dreamcast. Although this wasn't one of SEGA's most lucrative ventures, the machine is now worth a small fortune as just 850 were made.



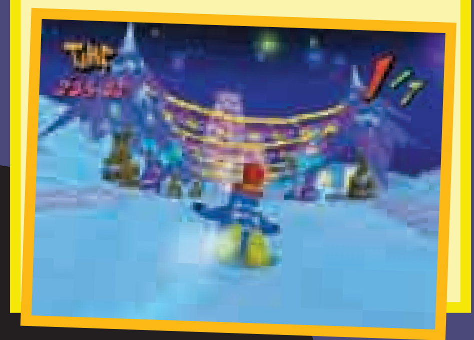



▲ Just like the film, Batman Returns on the SNES cleverly blends Christmas festivities with a much darker storyline.

The Playlist

If you're looking for a festive game to play this Christmas, why not try one of these…

- *Animal Crossing (GameCube)*
- *Batman Returns (SNES)*
- *Blue Stinger (Dreamcast)*
- *Christmas Lemmings (Amiga)*
- *Christmas NiGHTS (Saturn)*
- *Christmas Seaman (Dreamcast)*
- *Daze Before Christmas (Mega Drive/SNES)*
- *Father Christmas (Commodore 64)*
- *Father Christmas (Saturn)*
- *Gremlins (Multi)*
- *Horace Goes Skiing (Commodore 64)*
- *Mad Maestro: Christmas Edition (PlayStation2)*
- *Parasite Eve (PSone)*
- *Pen Pen TrIceLon (Dreamcast)*
- *A Popple's Christmas Adventure (Commodore 64)*
- *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing (Dreamcast)*
- *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing: Round 2 (Dreamcast)*
- *Santa Claus (BBC)*
- *Santa Claus In Trouble (PC)*
- *Santa Claus Junior (Game Boy Advance)*
- *Santa Claus Saves The Earth (Game Boy Advance/PSone)*
- *Secret Of Mana (Super Nintendo)*
- *Serious Sam (Xbox)*
- *Snow Bros. (Arcade/Mega Drive)*
- *Special Delivery: Santa's Christmas Chaos (Commodore 64)*
- *ToeJam & Earl III (Xbox)*



Then, of course, there were downloads available via Dreamarena that offered bonus features such as decorative textures and Christmas trees for certain Dreamcast games. Cynics may argue that this was merely a ploy to encourage gamers to go online, though it's unlikely that such minor offerings would attract interest from anyone not already using the service.

Whatever the reason for developers including Christmas bonus features in their products, though, there's no denying that playing games at this time of year can be an enjoyably exciting and nostalgic experience. We can't help wondering how many hardcore gamers sampled their first electronic game on Christmas day. The majority, we suspect. And those of you who didn't probably have at least a handful of fond videogame memories from the festive season. With publishers continuing to release all the biggest titles at this time of year, things look unlikely to change for current and future gamers. So settle down with a glass of egg nog, go through your retro library and see if you've got any of these titles. Have a merry Christmas, and whatever you get up to, be sure to have fun.

Let It Snow!

Platform games are often criticised for having too many clichéd locations on offer. It's true that many seem to start with a vivid, lush green level, before progressing to some sort of volcanic destination and, more often than not, an ice world. Of course, many of these ice worlds have a lot in common with the traditional picturesque Christmas scene (what with all the snow and everything), so it perhaps isn't surprising that some games should go all the way and feature Christmas trees and other such festive imagery.

In *Banjo-Kazooie* on the N64, for example, there was a level called Freezeezy Peak, in which many of the objectives were based around an enormous snowman-shaped mountain. Furthermore, there were other tasks that included finding presents and discovering how to power the fairy lights on a Christmas tree. This was all topped of with a typically polished Rare musical

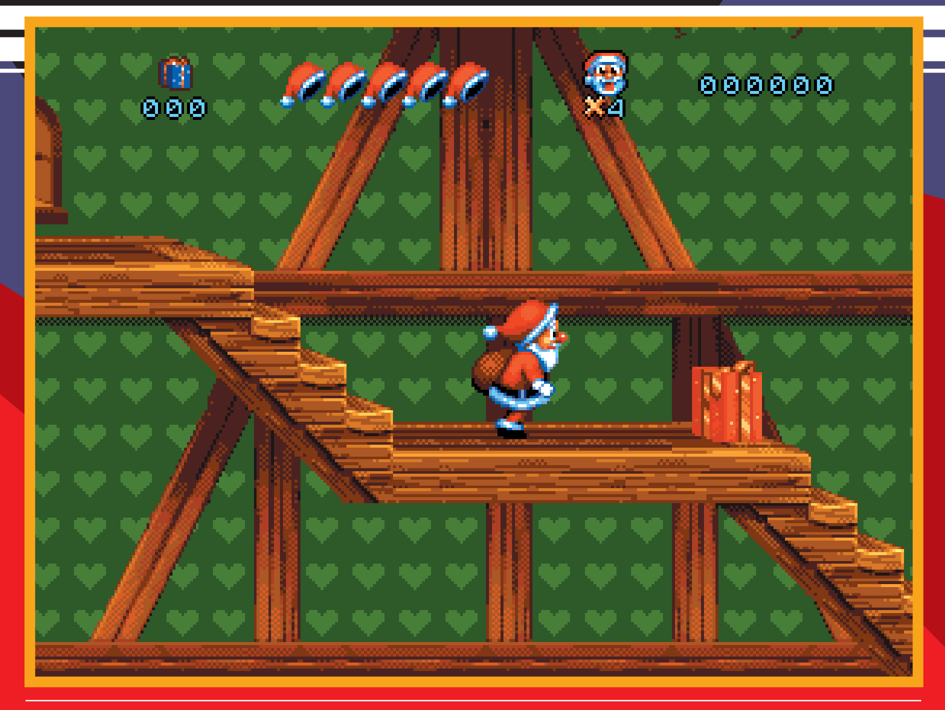


▶ *Ready 2 Rumble* and *Sonic Adventure* were two games that featured bonus Christmas content. This wasn't really a sales feature, but certainly brought a smile to the faces of festively-minded gamers.

Don't Open Until Christmas

While some games are designed specifically for release at Christmas, others include features that are created with Christmas in mind. Some of the most obvious of these have been on SEGA consoles, in particular, the Saturn and Dreamcast. Through clever use of the internal clocks within these two machines, developers such as Midway were able to offer Christmas 'gifts' in their games. Simply setting the Dreamcast clock to 25/12 would result in *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing*'s Price Fight arena being dressed with Christmas trees in the background. The sequel went a step further with secret costumes available for some characters, as well as the last boss being mysteriously represented by a snowman.

The Dreamcast was also something of a prelude to Microsoft's Xbox Live service in that it offered its users the option to download and save new, exclusive features from the net. Station Square in *Sonic Adventure*, for example, could be magically transformed into a winter wonderland, including Christmas trees and a special Christmas message for anyone who could actually be bothered to download it. We heard that one of the six people who went online with the Dreamcast here in the UK enjoyed this feature very much.



▲ Santa collecting presents was hardly the sort of thing to appeal to everyone. Fewer still after Christmas. But that's *Daze Before Christmas* for you.

composition that screamed Christmas in every way (though not a Noddy Holder way, thankfully).

Of course, there are many games out there that feature snow, not all of which are based around Christmas. Many racing and fighting games feature icy landscapes and, although this is certainly nothing new, some of the latest ones use impressive dynamics that simulate realistic snowfall and snowdrifts. With games such as *Dead Or Alive 3*, for example, snow is crushed beneath the fighters' feet, leaving snake-like pathways wherever the characters have moved. Even without complex dynamics, though, the slippery surfaces coded in many older platform games, and avalanches such as those seen in the skiing section of *Sonic The Hedgehog 3*, were equally impressive for their day. Even titles like *Super Mario Kart* were enhanced by the inclusion of treacherous ice stages.

The Daddy

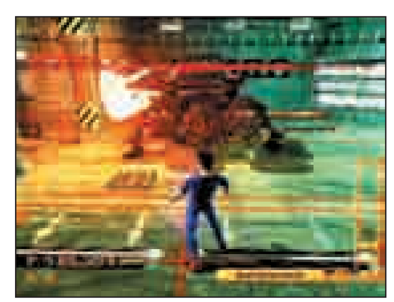
We've looked at games made especially for Christmas, games with Christmas worlds, and games with secret Christmas features, but what about the big man himself? Well, Father Christmas has starred in a number of videogames, going back as far as *Santa Claus* on the BBC. *Daze Before Christmas* on SNES and Mega Drive was another obvious one, in which Santa Claus had to fight off evil snowmen while collecting presents. Truly inspired, we're sure you'll agree.

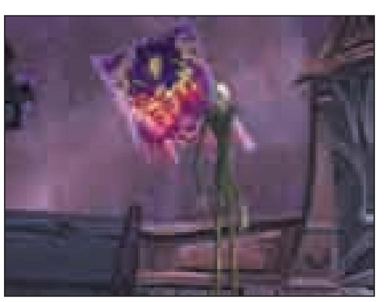
Aside from starring in games, Father Christmas has also showed up in cameo roles from time to time. In *The Secret Of Mana*, for example, you could visit his house which was cunningly tucked away in the ice world, funnily enough. Dreamcast owners may also remember bumping into him while wandering around the streets of Dobuita, though we're sad to report that this was merely a bloke in a costume.

However, one of the funniest interpretations we've seen of Father Christmas has to be the one in *Clay Fighter 63 1/3* on the N64. Called Sumo Santa, this grotesque, flabby character could flatten his opponents with a single Flying Belly Launcher or Stomach Spin. Alternatively, if you're looking for comedy Santas, you could try *ToeJam & Earl III* in which Santa Funk never went anywhere without his three hos. And at a time of year when Mr Blobby can get the number-one single, that's actually quite funny…

▼ It may be a bit pricey as far as retro games go, but look out for Santa's house if you ever manage to get a copy of *The Secret Of Mana*.







The Horror And The Ivy

You might have noticed that often in films and television when something good happens, something bad is just around the corner. After all, what better what to make something seem particularly awful than by putting it next to something nice? As videogames have become more graphics- and story-led, developers have started adopting this technique to give their games greater impact, with Christmas being the usual choice for the 'nice' factor.

Survival horrors such as *D2* and *Blue Stinger* are prime examples of this in action. Starting on Christmas day 2000, *D2* was set in the frozen wastelands of Canada, while *Blue Stinger* cleverly offset myriad monsters against a backdrop of Father Christmas billboards and fairy lights. *Parasite Eve* also used this technique to make its chilling story even more effective, and Capcom's upcoming *Nightmare Before Christmas* will almost certainly do the same, just like Tim Burton's animated masterpiece before it.



Retro Contact

Share your views about old-school gaming

First Contact

Welcome to a new part of the mag – the retro letters page. This is where you can blather on about old games to your heart's content and we'll listen patiently. Unless you ask something silly. Retro-style letters (about miners' strikes, Maggie etc) need not apply...

■ MUSIC: RESPONSE

Dear games™,
In issue 5's feature on all things Zelda, you mentioned the availability of soundtracks from the series. As a long-time fan of the Zelda music, this prompted me to see if I could get hold of any back catalogue. I managed to purchase the most recent release (*The Ocarina Of Time Re-arranged* album) online from AnimeNation, but all the others are either deleted or 'extremely rare' according to various websites. eBay seems the only option, though, of course, this is not the most reliable method.

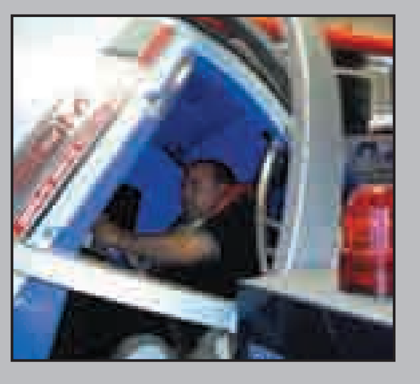
I wondered if you might know of any suppliers (preferably UK-based) that specialise in importing this kind of thing. I have tried all the usual gaming and record store outlets with no success, and telephoning Bensussen Deutsch, Nintendo's soundtrack contractor according to their website, leads to a fight with a computer voice system clearly designed for vendors and not the inferior public Joe.
Mike Monk, via e-mail

There are some great videogame soundtracks out there but all too often they're impossible to locate. We've been trying to find a symphonic recording of the *ActRaiser* soundtrack for ages, but they tend to be extremely pricey on the rare occasions that they do surface. Aside from eBay, a good website to try is gamemusic.com, though it can be quite expensive and is based in the States. Alternatively, you could try specialist retailers, such as Raven Games (ravengames.co.uk) or The Video Game Centre (videogame centre.co.uk), who stock a small selection of imported soundtracks, but can order specific titles.

YOU SPIN ME ROUND

Dear games™,
In issue 7 you had an article on the SEGA R360 arcade cabinet, and as far as you knew the nearest working cab was in Spain. Well, I have excellent news for anybody wanting to try this awesome baby out. A few friends and I recently went to Blackpool to find and play as many retro gaming machines as we could. Various classics were found but then we stumbled upon the Holy Grail – a fully working R360 cabinet with G-LOC installed. It even had a big sign on it advising that to ride the beast you would have to get an attendant.

Of course, the chance to ride this machine was too much – we found the nearest bored-looking attendant and he filled me in on the safety instructions. It did indeed, as you reported, have a big red stop button placed to my right inside the cab, and after strapping myself in I was thrown left, right and upside down every couple of seconds. Unfortunately, I cannot recall the name of the arcade but I would definitely recommend a go on this to anyone near Blackpool. It was only a quid a go as well, although I'm sure I lost another tenner in change by the end of the four-minute ride…
Adam Ransom, via email



Damn – there goes our attempt to blag a trip to Spain for 'research'. Thanks for supplying a photo of the machine, Adam. If any retro maniacs stumble across a rare arcade machine, tell us where you found it and send a photo too.

■ STORE FOR 64?

Dear games™,
I've just been looking at the N64 screenshots in last month's Retro section and I'd completely forgotten how many great games came out on that system. I love my GameCube and everything, but can't help feeling that

something is missing in the current generation. Big games like *Mario 64* and *GoldenEye* were so amazing at the time, and although I've got *Mario Sunshine* and *TimeSplitters*, it just isn't the same. Plus there were tons of other titles that were fun, such as *Diddy Kong Racing*, *Snowboard Kids*, *1080° Snowboarding* and Rare's brilliant *Blast Corps*, which most people seem to have forgotten about.

I'm actually thinking about buying another N64 to play all my favourite games again, but was wondering where's the best place to buy one at a good price? I don't really want to spend more than about £50 (especially seeing as I can get a Cube for about that price these days).

Scott Jones, via email

You're not wrong, Scott – the N64 had more good games available than most people would care to remember. As for the best place to buy one, we'd suggest starting on your local high street, simply because anything from a shop is likely to come with a guarantee. Gamestation is usually good value for money, especially if you're happy with an unboxed console. Alternatively, you could try eBay – £50 is likely to get you a console with several decent games if you're prepared to wait for the right one to come along. You could even put a wanted ad in GTM...

THE DRAGOON SAGA DRAGS ON

Dear games™,

Having read games™ issue 9, it was interesting to find a piece about the *Panzer Dragoon* artwork. It's great that you are showing such work – most game art consists of generic CG. Near the bottom, there was a little piece on the artist Moebius and his connection with the *Panzer Dragoon* games. Looking at that made me go to my magazine collection and dig out an issue of *Sega Saturn Magazine* (a mag deserving of a mention in the classic magazines section in Retro) where there was a small feature about the connection between Moebius's work and *Panzer Dragoon*.

At one point, Moebius created a book called *Arzach*, which involved a warrior riding a concrete, robotic pterodactyl on a quest to save the world. The comic featured no dialogue and was very popular in France where it was aimed at an adult audience (it featured lots of violence, nudity and so on). After a quick search on the internet, I found a picture of *Arzach* which clearly shows the similarities between that and *Panzer Dragoon*, therefore concluding that Ryuichiro Kutsuzawa and co. used Moebius's work as inspiration for their own brilliant work.

Benjamin Copeman, via email

We agree, SEGA's *Panzer Dragoon* artwork has always been very beautiful, and it's interesting to find out where the inspiration came from. Hopefully, *Orta* won't be the last game in the series





THE END, MY FRIEND

Dear games™,

In the Retro section of issue 10 you got a bit heated about not being able to complete *Gran Turismo 2* 100 per cent. Problem is that this is not strictly true. If you played the game as normal, yes, it was impossible to complete it 100 per cent. However, if you reloaded this 'finished' game, but this time selected German as the language, magically all those lovely Vauxhall cars were rebranded as Opels. This meant you could redo all the manufacturers' races in these 'new' cars and, consequently, actually complete the game beyond 100 per cent. Oddly, it did display a 100+ per cent figure, but without checking my old memory cards I can't remember precisely what this final percentage was.

'Greybeard', via email

Well, you learn something new every day. Irrespective of whether it was more or less than 100 per cent, though, *Gran Turismo 2* was still a flawed game. Certainly, there was an air of incompleteness about it, not to mention scruffy graphics and a lack of true innovation. Then again, it was squeezing so much out of the then ancient PSone technology. It tried, bless.

If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to say, why not write to us at:

Games™ Retro, Highbury – Paragon, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS

Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk



C·L·A·S·S·I·C C·O·N·S·O·L·E

BUYERS GUIDE QUICK REFERENCE

BUYERS GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£35 (the original model costs less)
Atari Jaguar	£25

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£200-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£100-150
PC Engine GT	£150-200
Super Grafx	£200-250

NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£35-40
Mega CD	£40-60
SEGA 32X	£30
SEGA Nomad	£75-100
SEGA Saturn	£30
Dreamcast	£25-30

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo Geo CD	£125-175
Neo Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£40-50

CONSOLE OF THE MONTH



- NAME: PC Engine
- PRICE: £70-250 (depending on model)
- THREE OF THE BEST:
  Parasol Stars (est. price £50)
  Bomberman '94 (est. price £50)
  Street Fighter II: Champion (est. price £20))
- Seeing as there are so many different PC Engines out there, it's not surprising that prices can vary by as much as £180.

HOW TO USE GTM

SELLING

To sell items on GTM, simply list the following details in an email to: gtm@paragon.co.uk

- Your name
- Your age (you must be over 18)
- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The item(s) you wish to sell (no more than five per month please)
- The condition of the item(s) you wish to sell
- How much you want for the item(s)

Each item will then be allocated a lot number and listed on GTM, along with your region in the UK.

BUYING

To buy an item from GTM, all you have to do is list the following details in an email to: gtm@paragon.co.uk

- Your name
- Your age (you must be over 18)
- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The reference number for the item you're interested in

WANTED

If you're simply trying to get hold of a long-desired item, contact us in the same way as above stating what you want and any preferences on its condition or price.

After contacting us, your email address will be passed onto the relevant seller or buyer, who will contact you directly to complete the deal, arrange payment and make plans for postage, collection or delivery. Please note that this runs on a first come, first served basis

GTM RULES AND SMALL PRINT

This is a service for private sellers, not dealers. GTM is for sales of retro games only – no post-Dreamcast consoles or games allowed. There's little point in advertising Mega Drive *FIFA* games as everybody already has at least two copies. Highbury - Paragon cannot take any responsibility for items lost or broken in the post

BUY & SELL your retro games with games™

G.T.M.

GAMES TRADING MARKET



Searching for an elusive copy of Radiant Silvergun? Want to sell that pile of Spectrum games taking up space around the house? Then check out GTM, the most authentic retro sales column in the world.

FOR SALE

Lot 31 – Neo-Geo Pocket Color and six games including *Metal Slug* and *Sonic*. Boxed as new. £80. Warwickshire

Lot 32 – *Arcade* games mags. All 12 issues. £20. Warwickshire

Lot 33 – *Get Bass* for SEGA Dreamcast, Japanese version. Boxed with fishing rod in mint condition. £40

Lot 34 – *House Of The Dead 2* for SEGA Dreamcast, Japanese version. Boxed with gun in mint condition. £35

Lot 35 – *Seaman* for SEGA Dreamcast, USA version. Boxed with mic in mint condition. £30

Lot 36 – *The King Of Fighters '99 Dream Match*, Japanese version. Boxed in mint condition. £20

Lot 37 – *Capcom Vs. SNK* for SEGA Dreamcast, Japanese version. Boxed in mint condition. £20

Lot 39 – *Terranigma* for Super Nintendo, PAL version. Boxed in very good condition. £80. Sussex

Lot 40 – *Elite Plus* for Amiga, PAL version. Boxed with instructions, good condition. £2 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 41 – *Rocket Ranger* for Amiga, PAL version. Boxed with instructions, good condition. £1 plus p+p. North Yorks



Lot 42 – Game Boy Color plus *Metal Gear Solid*, *Tennis* and printer. All unboxed. £25 (or near offer). Fife

Lot 43 – Neo-Geo Pocket Color (clear vinyl) including *Sonic* and *Pac-Man*. Boxed as new. £80. Barnes

Lot 44 – Nintendo 64 (turquoise clear vinyl) plus two controllers and *Mario 64*. Boxed as new. £60. Barnes

Lot 45 – *Metal Gear: Snake's Revenge* for NES. Boxed with slipcase, but no instructions available. Very good condition. £10 plus p+p (o.n.o.). West Mids

Lot 46 – Atari VCS 2600 (woody) with two joysticks, four paddles, plus games including *Space Invaders* and *Missile Command*. Working with PSU. Open to offers. Coventry.

Lot 47 – Sinclair Spectrum 48k with tons of games, including *Skool Daze* and *Gauntlet*. Two joysticks. Working with PSU. Open to offers. Coventry.

Lot 48 – V-Lab/Virtual Lab for Virtual Boy. New condition. £300 plus p+p. Surrey.

WANTED

WANTED 15 – *Panzer Dragoon Mini* for SEGA Game Gear. Must have box and instructions. Poole

WANTED 18 – *Chrono Trigger* for Super Nintendo. Preferably with box and instructions. Will pay up to £70. Londonderry, NI

WANTED 19 – WonderSwan dating games. Must be in good condition with boxes and instructions. Surrey

WANTED 20 – *King Of Fighters '95* (Jap or USA version) for Neo-Geo AES. Must be boxed with manual. Derbyshire

WANTED 21 – *Star Ocean: The Second Story* for PSone. Must be in good condition, preferably with box and instructions. Forfar.

WANTED 22 – PC engine NEC FX console or Super Grafx console. Must be in good condition. Will pay £80. Barnes

WANTED 23 – *King Of Fighters 2001* (Jap) for SEGA Dreamcast. Will pay up to £20. Barnes

WANTED 24 – *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* (Jap) for SEGA Dreamcast. Will pay up to £20. Barnes

WANTED 25 – *Ikaruga* (Jap) for SEGA Dreamcast. Will pay up to £20. Barnes

WANTED 26 – *The Secret Of Mana* for Super Nintendo. Any condition accepted, providing the game works. Manchester.

WANTED 27 – SNES or Mega Drive. Will pay up to £20. Bristol.

WANTED 28 – Any interesting JAMMA arcade boards, arcade cabinets etc. Also looking for a Neo-Geo MVS motherboard.

GAMES™ RETRO CLASSIFIEDS

Send to: **games™, Retro Classifieds, Highbury - Paragon, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS or email gtm@paragon.co.uk**

Name...

Address...

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Tick classified heading

❑ **FOR SALE** ❑ **WANTED**

Write your advertisement here, one word per box, and only include your name, address, phone number and/or email address below if you want them printed



M NETWORK TITLES (Atari VCS, Sears Video Arcade System) Mattel, 1982 – American advert


eMag

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

PLAYSTATION2

MANUFACTURER Sony **UK LAUNCH DATE** 24 November 2000 **MEDIA** 4.75-inch DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £139.99



The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. With support across the board from third-party developers, a built-in DVD player and backward compatibility with older PSone games, it's the most popular videogame console available today.

TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

No.	Title		Publisher	Developer	Comment
1	Ico		SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
2	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City		Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Enough content to keep you going for a long while
3	Pro Evolution Soccer 3		Konami	In-House	If you only own one football game, it should be this
4	Tony Hawk's Underground		Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the *Tony Hawk* series
5	Dark Chronicle		Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
6	Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time		Ubisoft	In-House	Ubisoft shows how to make a proper retro update
7	Rez		SEGA	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
8	Amplitude		Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
9	Beyond Good & Evil		Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
10	SSX 3		Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk* of the snowboarding world
11	Suikoden III	IMPORT	Konami	In-House	Konami's RPG series is still as good as it ever was
12	Metal Slug 3	IMPORT	Playmore	In-House	Old-school shooting has never been so much fun
13	Freedom Fighters		Electronic Arts	Io Interactive	Top-notch squad-based action with an arcade twist
14	NBA Street 2		Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The daddy of basketball games – no contest
15	Colin McRae Rally 04		Codemasters	In-House	Realistic racing for the purist in all of us
16	Project Zero		Wanadoo	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
17	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact		Acclaim	Criterion	Arcade racing at its very purest – fun with a capital F
18	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin		Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent, but deadly – a real killer of a game
19	TimeSplitters 2		Eidos	Free Radical	More multiplayer fun than most other FPS games
20	Devil May Cry		Capcom	In-House	The original is still the best by a long shot

THE DEADLY VIPER ASSASSINATION SQUAD

Ico

By now, you should have realised that we're not going to stop telling you to go buy *Ico*. It's a crime if you don't.



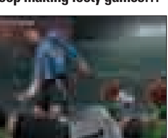
GTA: Vice City

Rockstar's free-roaming franchise just keeps on rolling – no doubt the twin pack will sell like mad.



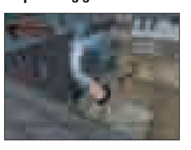
Pro Evolution Soccer 3

Considering Konami's series exists, you have to wonder why other people keep making footy games…



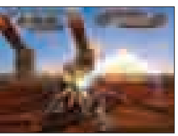
Tony Hawk's Underground

Neversoft's new take on the franchise might be a bit 'different', but that doesn't stop it being great.



Dark Chronicle

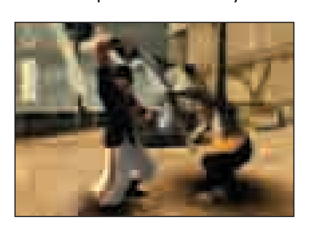
As RPG games go, this is a bit of a monster. If you can do it all in under 60 hours, you'll be lucky…



VIEWPOINT

PRINCE OF PERSIA: SANDS OF TIME

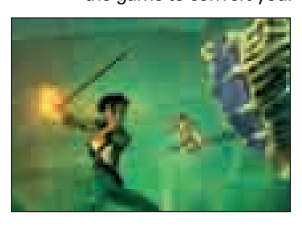
Developers, take note: if you're updating a classic title for the MTV generation, this is the way to do it. Stylish, easy to pick up and very enjoyable (if a little too short). The Prince out-platforms Lara by miles.



VIEWPOINT

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

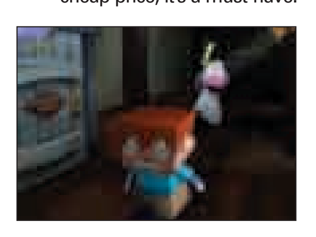
Mmm… *Zelda* goodness, but without the Nintendo packaging. Ubisoft might just have broken the mould, thanks to *BG&E*'s subtle mix of many different game styles. If you're not a fan of RPG action adventuring, this is the game to convert you.



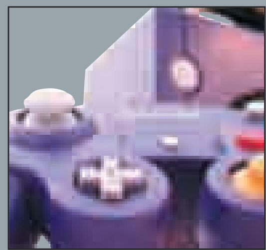
VIEWPOINT

GREGORY HORROR SHOW

Possibly the weirdest game we've played in a long time, yet one that's also great fun – particularly if you're a fan of mind-bending gameplay and tongue-in-cheek horror. Considering the incredibly cheap price, it's a must-have.













XBOX

MANUFACTURER Microsoft **UK LAUNCH DATE** 13 March 2002 **MEDIA** 4.75-inch DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £129.99



Despite a slow start, the Xbox is swiftly becoming one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to the casual gamer than most PCs.

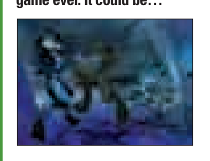
TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
1	Halo	Microsoft	Bungie	The game that sold a million Xbox consoles
2	Panzer Dragoon Orta	SEGA	Smilebit	Classic shoot-'em-up action, the SEGA way
3	Jet Set Radio Future	SEGA	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
4	Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	In-House	Who needs Solid Snake when you've got Sam Fisher?
5	Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games in existence
6	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical	More multiplayer fun than most other FPS games
7	Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations	Redefining how we play games online
8	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the *Tony Hawk* series
9	Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
10	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion Studios	Arcade racing at its very purest – fun with a capital F
11	Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
12	Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
13	SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk* of the snowboarding world
14	Moto GP	THQ	Climax	Bargain-priced motorbike racing action
15	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent, but deadly – a real killer of a title
16	Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	Z-Axis	Surprisingly enjoyable, considering the competition
17	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive	Top-notch squad-based action with an arcade twist
18	Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	In-House	Realistic racing for the purist in all of us
19	Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	Shaba Games	More than just *Tony Hawk* on water
20	Tiger Woods 2004	Electronic Arts	In-House	Young Mr Woods shows us all how it should be done

THE ANT HILL MOB

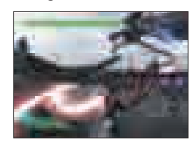
Halo

Like it or not, there's an awful lot of people out there who think *Halo* is the best game ever. It could be…



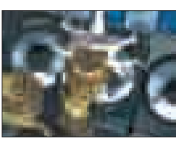
Panzer Dragoon Orta

SEGA's update of its classic franchise is what could be described as 'taking it back to the roots'.



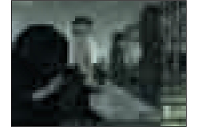
Jet Set Radio Future

It might have a lot to answer for as far as cel-shading goes, but we still love a bit of graffiti…



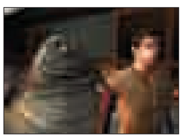
Splinter Cell

Ubisoft really re-wrote the book on stealth games when it came to Sam Fisher's daring adventures.



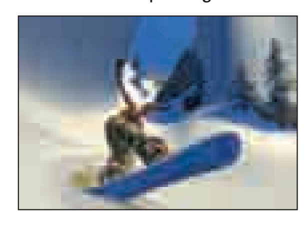
Star Wars: KOTOR

Believe the hype – as long as you can take all the stats, this really is the best *Star Wars* game in ages.



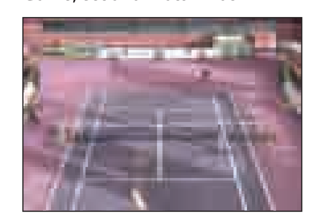
VIEWPOINT
SSX 3

Ah, there's nothing like racing down a mountainside at breakneck speed on a snowboard – well, unless you're playing *SSX* that is. Once again, EA defies logic and creates a game that's the last one again, only better. How does it keep doing it?



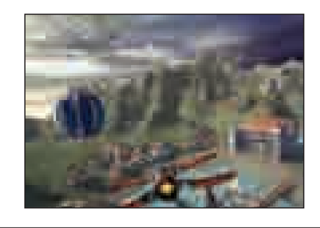
VIEWPOINT
TOP SPIN

Those of you who've been fed a diet of *Virtua Tennis* since the days of the Dreamcast should be warned – there's a new taste sensation on the block. Strange as it may seem, Microsoft's offering really is blindingly good. Game, set and match Xbox.



VIEWPOINT
CRIMSON SKIES: HIGH ROAD TO REVENGE

If there's one thing that's never been done well online, it's dogfighting; a problem that *Crimson Skies* almost manages to put right. Blasting your friends out of the sky really is the way forward. Well, maybe.

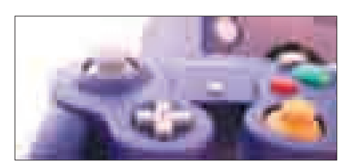


ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

GAMECUBE

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **UK LAUNCH DATE** 3 May 2002 **MEDIA** 3-inch Optical Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £79.99



Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming on offer. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever and missing out isn't really an option.

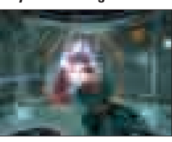
TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
1	Metroid Prime	Nintendo	In-House	A genre-redefining title in every sense
2	Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	One of the many reasons to own a GameCube
3	F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	SEGA does it again with a brilliant retro remake
4	Winning Eleven 6 IMPORT	Konami	In-House	The closest you'll get to *Pro Evolution…*
5	Super Monkey Ball 2	SEGA	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
6	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical	More multiplayer fun than most other FPS games
7	Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	Another great moment in gaming from Nintendo
8	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the *Tony Hawk* series
9	Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
10	Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House	Not as ground-breaking as we hoped, but still great
11	Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
12	Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
13	Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour IMPORT	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
14	Resident Evil	Capcom	In-House	Still as scary as it was when it first came out
15	Resident Evil Zero	Capcom	In-House	An interesting twist on the *Resident Evil* franchise
16	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	In-House	Arcade racing at its very purest – fun with a capital F
17	Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	In-House	Looks great, plays even better
18	Skies Of Arcadia Legends	SEGA	Overworks	Absorbing RPG action with added 'arrrr' factor
19	Star Wars: Rogue Leader	Activision	Factor 5	Forget the follow-up – the original still has the edge
20	Animal Crossing IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year

FOX FORCE FIVE

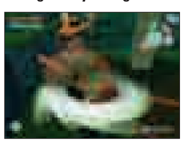
Metroid Prime

The only game so far to score a 'perfect' ten in the magazine – shouldn't that tell you something?



Zelda: The Wind Waker

Forget what people said about Link's new cel-shaded look being bad – they were wrong. Really wrong.



F-Zero GX

Faster than a speeding bullet? Oh yes. In fact, *F-Zero* is faster than a speeding bullet that's already late.



Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution

***Pro Evo*'s never coming out on the GC, so you'll have to make do with this…**



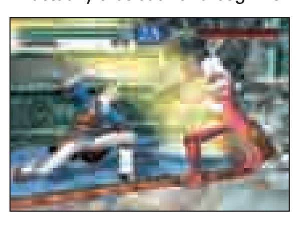
Super Monkey Ball 2

Any game with monkeys in it is great – that's the law. But then, we'd still love this even if we didn't have to.



VIEWPOINT
SOUL CALIBUR II

Oh, sweet irony. With our copy of *Soul Calibur II* being discovered by 'the wife', we've been dragged back into playing it… if only because she demanded to be told that she's good at it. Still, her performance with Ivy isn't actually that bad for a beginner.



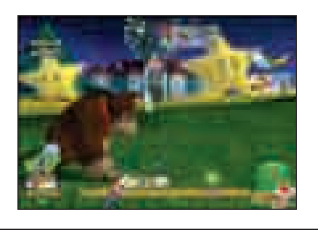
VIEWPOINT
BILLY HATCHER AND THE GIANT EGG

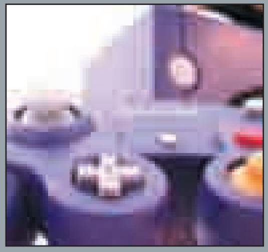
Oh, Billy – what happened? Sure, you managed to deliver some fun multiplayer gameplay and looked the business but that's not quite enough to cover up your many flaws. It's a shame – we were so hoping you'd be our best friend.

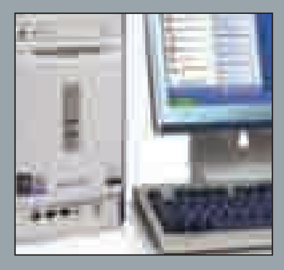


VIEWPOINT
MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR

Damn you, Nintendo – and there we were, hoping you might get this one out before Christmas. Thankfully, we've got our pristine US copies to keep us happy, but still… what about those not fortunate enough to import, eh?



GBA

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **UK LAUNCH DATE** 22 June 2001
MEDIA Flash Cartridge **CURRENT PRICE** £89.99



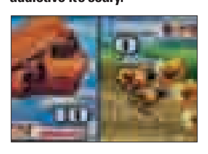
Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available now.

TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher		Developer
1	Advance Wars 2	Nintendo		In-House
2	Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo		Square-Enix
3	Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo		In-House
4	Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo		In-House
5	Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo		Camelot
6	Metroid Fusion	Nintendo		In-House
7	Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami		In-House
8	Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo		In-House
9	Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami		In-House
10	Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe	Wanadoo		Crawfish
1	Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubisoft		Crawfish
2	Yu-Gi-Oh: Stairway To The Destined Duel	Konami		In-House
3	Super Mario Advance 4: SMB 3	Nintendo		In-House
4	Pinball Challenge Deluxe	Ubisoft		Binary 9
6	Pokémon Pinball Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo		In-House
7	Legend Of Stafi	Nintendo	IMPORT	In-House
9	Mario Kart: Super Circuit	Nintendo		In-House
5	CT Special Forces	LSP		In-House
8	Final Fight One	Ubisoft		Capcom
10	Wario Ware Inc: Mega Microgame$	Nintendo		In-House

THE SHARKS

Advance Wars 2
■ **You wouldn't think that strategy games would be so much fun – but this one's so addictive it's scary.**



FF Tactics Advance
■ **Just as great as *Advance Wars*, but with a distinct fantasy flavour. We just can't get enough of it.**



Zelda: Link To The Past
■ **The SNES port is fantastic on its own, but combine that with *Four Swords* and you've got an unmissable title.**



PC

MANUFACTURER N/A **UK LAUNCH DATE** N/A
MEDIA 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £variable



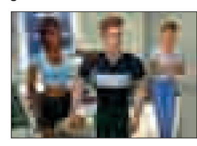
While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics..

TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

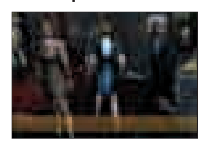
No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	The Sims	EA	Maxis
2	Deus Ex	Eidos	Ion Storm
3	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
4	Championship Manager 03/04	Eidos	Sports Interactive
5	Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve Software
6	Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
7	Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House
8	Medieval: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
9	Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
10	Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
11	System Shock	EA	Looking Glass Games
12	Call Of Duty	Activision	Infinity Ward
13	Sam And Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
14	Commandos 2: Men Of Courage	Eidos	Pyro
15	Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
16	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
17	Day of Defeat	Activision	Valve Software
18	Tron 2.0	Buena Vista	Monolith
19	Battlefield 1942	EA	In-House
20	Unreal Tournament 2003	Atari	Epic Games

THE JETS

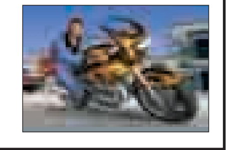
The Sims
■ **Milked for all it's worth and yet still as great as it was when it first appeared. You've got to love *The Sims*.**



Deus Ex
■ **Freeform gaming as it was meant to be; if only all games were this way. We can't wait for the sequel to arrive…**



GTA: Vice City
■ **Looks better than its PS2 cousin, and still has just as much 'cool' factor to keep PC gamers playing for ages.**



PERIPHERALS

THEY MAY NOT BE EVERYONE'S CUP OF TEA, BUT EACH CONSOLE HAS ITS OWN MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS – THOSE LITTLE EXTRAS THAT MAKE THE GAMING EXPERIENCE ALL THE MORE PLEASURABLE. CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THESE?

PS424 DANCE MAT

CONSOLE PlayStation2 **FROM** Logic 3
CURRENT PRICE £49.99 **AVAILABLE** Now

Okay, so maybe you're not quite as hardened a fan of dancing games as we are – we can respect that. Of course, that also means that when you do decide to have a quick go at the latest *Dancing Stage* title, you won't be willing to fork out stupid amounts of cash on a decent dance mat; something that's understandable, but could be the reason why you're not keen on the genre in the first place. Luckily, Logic 3 once again has the answer in the form of its latest dance peripheral.

While not as arcade-like (and thus expensive) as its metal cousin, the PS424 is still an impressive bit of kit – mainly because being solid plastic as opposed to the flexible kind means it can withstand some serious punishment while replicating a decent arcade-style experience. At under £50, it's pretty much a snip for anyone looking for a quality dance-related bargain.

ZEN NX JUKEBOX

CONSOLE PC **FROM** Creative
CURRENT PRICE £249.99 **AVAILABLE** Now



Portable music is all the rage these days – and with all these newfangled electronic contraptions and whatnot, listening to your favourite 'choons' has never been so easy. The next step, however, isn't what you can listen to but rather how much; that's why you need an all-powerful MP3 player to take everywhere, and Creative has just the thing.

Sure, so it might not have the exuberant curves of Apple's iPod but then it doesn't carry the extortionate price tag either; at just £250 for a whopping 30 gigabytes of space (that's about 8,000 songs), and a longer-lasting rechargeable battery to boot, you can't complain in the slightest.

The software's also incredibly easy to use and, even better, the Zen doubles as a portable hard drive in case you need to transfer files between PCs. Needless to say, it's our new favourite accessory for those long, lonely PR jaunts…

PS2 IN-CAR ADAPTER

CONSOLE PlayStation2 **FROM** Joytech
CURRENT PRICE £29.99 **AVAILABLE** Now

While we're not the kind of people to advocate playing anything other than a GBA in a car, there are some who are determined to make use of their consoles on the move. Unfortunately, using something as bulky and power-hungry as a PS2 in-car isn't easy.

Pick up one of JOYTECH's new In-Car Adapters, though, and it's a different story. Designed specifically for use with the PS2, it regulates the power coming from the car battery and prevents the excessive power drain that you'd get from using a normal adapter. What's more, the internal workings keep tabs on your car battery's performance and shut down automatically if it feels you won't have enough power to start your car – which is useful if you actually want to get anywhere. If you want to turn your car into a moving entertainment system, this is a good place to start.

INSPIRE GD580 5.1 SPEAKERS

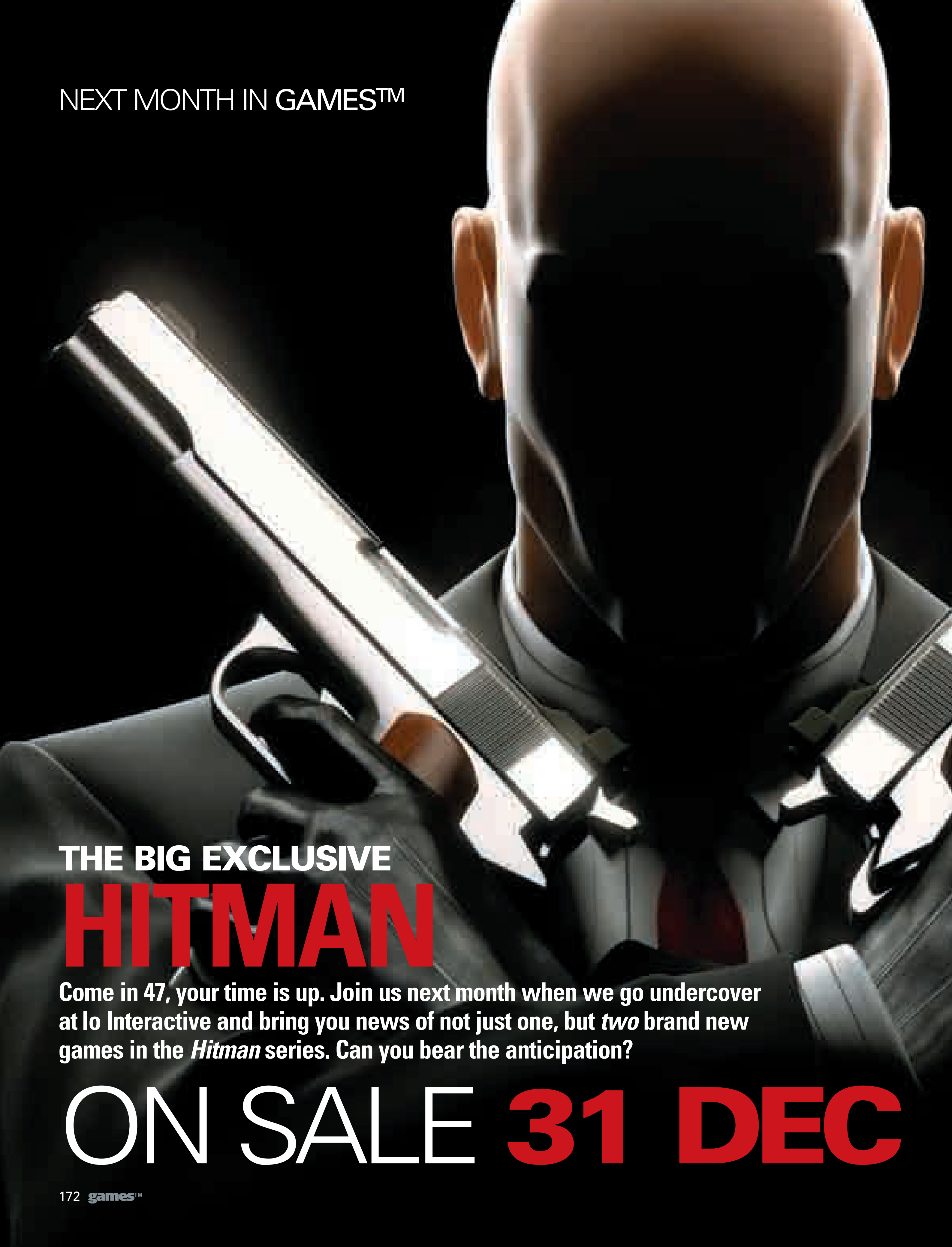
CONSOLE PS2/Xbox/GameCube **FROM** Creative
CURRENT PRICE £149.99 **AVAILABLE** Now

We're always harping on about quality sound being just as important as a quality picture when it comes to games. However, quality doesn't always mean 'stupidly expensive', as Creative has managed to successfully demonstrate with its range of console-based speakers in the past.

Its latest 5.1 speaker set continues the trend – as well as featuring all the requisite inputs you'd expect from a decent sound system, it has a more dynamic design than the previous model and a more accessible remote control for people who didn't like the microscopic layout of the original. Being from Creative, it's only natural to expect quality and this doesn't disappoint. If you need a decent but affordable sound system, look no further.




eMag



NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™
THE BIG EXCLUSIVE
HITMAN
Come in 47, your time is up. Join us next month when we go undercover at Io Interactive and bring you news of not just one, but *two* brand new games in the *Hitman* series. Can you bear the anticipation?
ON SALE 31 DEC



NEXT MONTH

MORE… PREVIEWS

The post-Christmas drought looms, but there's more to look forward to in the spring, even if it's only because half of December's games slipped. Bah

MORE… REVIEWS

We go GBA crazy with *Mario & Luigi*, *Sword Of Mana* and *Fire Emblem*, plus we look at the leftovers of the festive rush. Oh, and *Manhunt* too, if it ever actually turns up

MORE… FEATURES

games™ dodges flames in San Diego to see what Sony Online Entertainment is up to, chews the cud with the man behind *The Sims 2,* and gets the lowdown on live gaming events from E3 to conventions

Please note: Due to late code and unforseen circumstances and stuff, we can't guarantee that the next issue will actually contain all these things. But it will definitely have *something* in it.

CONTACT
ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

HAVING LOOKED AT THIS MONTH'S POSTBAG WE CAN ONLY ASSUME THAT THEY'VE BEEN ADDING STUFF TO THE WATER. PERHAPS GAMING REALLY IS BAD FOR YOU…

Online gaming is bad, videogames are too violent and grannies in 'enjoying games' shocker. Come back, Nintendo zealots, all is forgiven…



MAKING CONTACT

☐ **There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:**

games™
Highbury - Paragon
Paragon House
St Peter's Road
Bournemouth
BH1 2JS

☐ However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the Internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

☐ Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum? Here you should be shielded from multiple spams and infantile remarks. Access to the site has been password protected and only those of you who read **games™** will be able to get onto the site – and if you have bought this magazine then you're not the sort to be abusive and childish, are you? Follow these quick steps to getting on the **games™** forum and enjoy hassle-free chatting with those of us who share a passion for gaming.

☐ **Step One:**
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

☐ **Step Two:**
Type the following into the Net browser window: **www.totalgames.net**
You will arrive at the Totalgames website. From here click on the 'forum' icon. News users will have to register via the 'new user' icon – it's a simple step-by-step process which we're sure you can manage.

☐ **Step Three:**
Once registered, simply email **gamestm@paragon.co.uk** with the password '**mince**' and your username. Then a whole world of sophisticated wit and games chat will be yours. It says here.

☐ **THE OTHER DAY** whilst I was in my local Game store, I noticed an elderly couple sifting through the pre-owned GameCube games – I assumed that they were looking for games with a Disney character on the box for their grandchild. However, I was amazed when the woman asked me if I had *Zelda*. Taken aback, I told her that yes, I had, and that it was a brilliant game. She agreed, and began telling me about all her favourite parts of the game.

We stood talking for ten minutes, about various different games, and it was amazing to talk to somebody of that age (she looked around 70) who enjoyed videogames. The moral of the story? Well, the games industry has moved on. Ten years ago, when game shops were all dingy geek magnets, I can't imagine ever meeting somebody like this. Moral number two? Never judge a book by its cover…
Matty Foster

games™: So, let's get this straight: people of all ages enjoy playing videogames. Blimey. If she comes in again, ask for her number so we can contact her about retro, retro gaming. And, of course, let's remember that she might not have been that old. Steve Martin was grey by his mid-twenties, you know…

☐ **RECENTLY, I HAVE** been reading a lot of worrying reports about the forthcoming sequels to the biggest games of yesterday (I speak of *Half-Life 2*, *Halo 2*, *Doom III* and so on). This has made me feel the need to write to you about people who get so riled about something that they cannot even play yet. I understand that the hype machine is rolling for all these games and people are worried that their favourite franchises might not turn out to be as good as their predecessors.

However, why not just enjoy what's available now? After all, if, when the *Halo 2*s or *Doom III*s come out, you have no expectations then chances are you will have a greater chance of enjoying them. If you believe the hype the chances are that you will be disappointed.
Ewan Fisher

games™: Well, perhaps Public Enemy were right all along. Or perhaps hype isn't such a bad thing. Maybe people like having something to look forward to…

☐ **I'M CONCERNED ABOUT** the direction gaming is taking. Games seem to be going for a more realistic and lifelike approach, but is this a good thing? With so much violence, hate and killing in this world, do we really need games that encourage us to do this kind of thing?

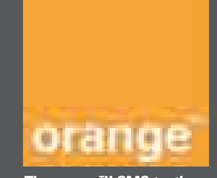
I turn to gaming as a chance to get away from the problems of modern life. Perhaps that is why I stick by Nintendo – it seems to understand that gaming should be about fun

"THOUGH I DO ENJOY ONLINE GAMING, I CAN'T SEE IT EVER REPLACING THE SHEER JOY OF BEATING SOMEONE FACE-TO-FACE"

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Will online games like *PGR2* sound the death knell for more traditional gaming? Of course not…

and enjoyment for everyone. There is nothing more relaxing than forgetting your problems and launching yourself head first into a brightly coloured world where if you make a mistake you can simply redo that section, or turn off your console.

Games like *Vice City* badly influence young people, and although it may seem fun to speed round town shooting whoever you want to, it's actually bad for you, as has been proved by scientific research.

Read the following scenarios:

a). You have a machine gun in your hand. Behind you is a trail of death and destruction. All you have to do to complete the level is blow up the explosive barrels in front of you. You lay the mines and they explode. Level complete. You're treated to a corny video where the hero runs out of the complex, which is exploding behind him, and grabs the axle of a small plane and makes it to safety.

b). The last star is almost within your reach. All you have to do is bounce off a dinosaur, back-flip over to the top of a tree, then hover using a water-powered jet pack and the level is completed. You make it to the star, but suddenly you're plunged into a technicolour spiral of bold colours. You walk forward and open a small box. A huge boss pops out and starts trying to jump on you, but after a bit of mad running, jumping and spraying the boss stops dead in his tracks and you can finally get that last star. The hero spins round, the star hovering above his hand, and you have saved an entire island from destruction again. Not only that, but you've won the princess back and she bakes you a cake to celebrate.

Now answer these questions:

1. Which game do you think is more comical, and therefore more entertaining?
2. Which game has a wider possibility of scenarios and puzzles?
3. Which game would be available to a wider audience?
4. Which game would you choose?

The answer to those questions should be B. It's more entertaining because of the lack of realism, it offers lots more puzzles and challenges, and people of all ages can play it. Just because a game lacks realism, doesn't mean it isn't a mature or hardcore game. Take *Mario Sunshine* – not many adults have completed it because it's rock hard, even though it's nice and colourful and doesn't feature weapons or violent death.

Games should be fun and an escape from reality. Games these days are becoming too violent and lifelike, and are no longer providing the same level of escape and 'protection' from the real world.

James Baker

games™: Where to start? Okay, some games are violent, some are aimed at a broader market. The same can be said of music and films – for every *Kill Bill* there's a *Finding Nemo*. Each has its own merits and each entertains in its own way. If you have a problem with that, avoid the games that you don't like – it's that simple. To criticise the wealth of gaming experiences is somewhat short-sighted. You seem to forget that toting semi-automatic weaponry and getting the glamorous girl is also in the realms of fantasy for the majority of gamers, and so these games are also an escape from the drudgery of real life. And just because

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

TEXT LIFE...

☐ Nice to see Burning Rubber on the last page. What a game.
gamesTM: We're glad you liked our transitional back page.

☐ In your capcom article in issue 12 there is a picture of Street Fighter Alpha 2 with the characters Ryu and Bison yet their names are shown as Ryu and Vega. Why
gamesTM: Try reading the wordy thing next to it entitled 'All Change'.

☐ Is it true baldurs gate 2 for the PS2 will be delayed till next year? If so, I'm gonna cry…
gamesTM: Best get your hanky out…

☐ U no, i don't care if there isn't a gaming market in the future. As long as I can enjoy some good games now im happy
gamesTM: That's the spirit!

☐ best games mag since the ill-fated total control and less full of your own crap like edge.
gamesTM: Thanks, but *Edge* isn't full of crap. Mind you, it doesn't have a full team either – our respect goes out to them.

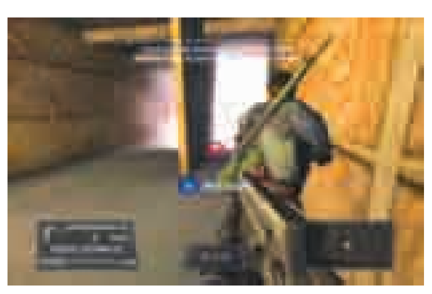
☐ i want turrican and creatures updates 4 my xbox. NOW dammit! Im in withdrawal.
gamesTM: Mmm, *Turrican* update…

☐ RE Game shows on tv i find GAMERWEB guite entertaining but it is a text money making racket. Bring back the late night thrills of BITS. Any chance of a return.
gamesTM: Very unlikely, but we suspect that you can find the kind of televisual 'thrills' you are looking for elsewhere.

☐ Is it just me, or is anyone else wondering why games such as jedi academy have characters who can't walk properly and instead slide across the terrain?
gamesTM: Yeah, they're shifty buggers – we don't trust them either.

☐ Aha! From the screenshot at the bottom of issue 11, page 36, I see u guys favour Kilik in Soul Calibur 2, a wise choice! "This rod shall be your doom" you know…
gamesTM: Well, that's all down to 'One Move Mathers'.

☐ Big up 2 C.Miller on his GameCube rant in issue 11. When the time of the ABCbox & Playstation (insert number here) dawns I'll still be playing my GameCube. Hah!
gamesTM: I thought we were trying to get away from this sort of thing?



something's 'comical' doesn't make it more entertaining. Would *Resident Evil* be better with a few gags in it? No. In the same way that some people prefer horror films to comedies, so some people play games for an escape that's a bit more atmospheric or scary. And what's this 'scientific research' then…?

☐ **WHEN IT COMES** to games, I get no better sense of enjoyment than when I am thrashing my mates for the hundredth time on whatever game the choice of the day may be. I like to laugh in their face and cuss in their general direction as I romp home to yet another victory. Conversely, I enjoy the invaluable target practice I get when I lose, be it using my pad, an ashtray or a flailing limb.

My point? Though I do sometimes enjoy online gaming, I can't see it ever replacing the sheer joy experienced when you beat someone face-to-face, or the merits of being able to react physically when you lose.

Online gaming won't take over from offline multiplayer. I can see it will grow into a lucrative market in the next few years but it will always be subservient to the gathering of mates in what has been officially christened a 'post-pub session'.
Ian Dransfield

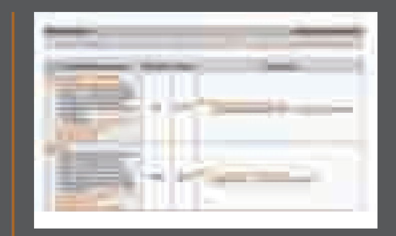
gamesTM: Well, yes, you've got a point, and we doubt online gaming will replace 'the real thing'. But you're clearly overlooking the potential for online post-pub gaming. Why slur drunken insults at your mates when you can slur them at a complete stranger over the headset? Still, you're not the only one who isn't convinced by online gaming…



☐ **ONLINE GAMING IS** bad for gamers – let me explain why. Online gaming means developers don't have to spend ages fine tuning the AI, because a 12-year-old American boy will provide it for them. Online gaming already means you pay full price for a less than complete game with the promise of 'extras' (i.e. the rest of the game you've already paid for during your subscription period). Online gaming will eventually mean that you won't be able to buy games; you'll lease them. There will be no tangible product, only downloaded software lost when you power off. Online gaming means you will pay for every minute you play.

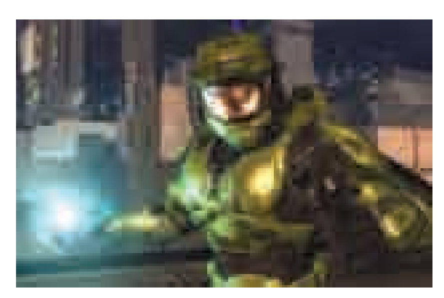
Online gaming is not for gamers – it's for everybody else. You know the people in the adverts. They have a 'lifestyle', they smile all the time and are excited by the idea of games but don't really have the time or inclination to spend hours playing. They just want to play and go – they don't like it when games are too difficult. The trouble is, most people don't love games. They don't study the magazines and get involved in forums to discover the best games – they just buy the game with the best advertising (and don't get me started on the non-gamers' love of pretty cut-scenes).

The trouble is, online gaming makes a lot of sense for the software companies. When games are downloaded and the consoles have no storage medium, there will be far less piracy. There are no distribution costs, no retailer problems, no customer returns. Sure, you have to provide a helpline, but there's money to be made there, right? There'll be no second-hand games where the retailers get all the money and the publishers get none. And retro gamers can forget it – once the lifestyle crowd have



FROM THE FORUM

Is length important? Or are shorter games better for the MTV generation?



Is it worth getting excited about *Halo 2*? Or should we just ignore all the hype?

"ONLINE GAMING IS NOT FOR GAMERS – IT'S FOR EVERYBODY ELSE. YOU KNOW, THE PEOPLE IN THE ADVERTS. THEY HAVE A 'LIFESTYLE'"

moved on, the servers will be shut down and it's time for a new console. But don't worry folks – we've got next-gen updates of all your old favourites (at up to the minute prices)!

In a nutshell, online gaming means your quality of game is dependent on the quality of the other people playing it. Online gaming means the end of difficult and complex games to satisfy people who don't really play games, but like the idea of them and love the pretty graphics. Online gaming means you can enjoy a game right up to the moment it's unprofitable. It will mean no nostalgia, no game shops, no second-hand games and no games collections. It doesn't have to happen, but if it does there'll be a tear in my eye. But in another room in the house my wife will punch the air with a victorious 'Yes!'.

Roland Casewell

games™: Not another one… This worryingly Luddite view of online gaming seems fairly widespread, but we're sure your concern is unfounded. Yes, online gaming opens up the potential for some of the things you mention, but it will never replace 'proper' gaming – certainly as long as there are non-lifestyle gamers out there. Of course, if today's gaming isn't your thing and you're not inclined to find out the facts about online gaming, then why don't you either delve back into retro gaming or spend more time with your wife – from what you said, we think that she might appreciate it.

☐ **RECENT TRIPS TO** seaside towns and holiday places have made me open my eyes to a number of games consoles that many people may not know of: mini consoles that plug directly into TVs. I've spotted many PlayStation-shaped consoles and plug-in controllers offering 8-bit action. And it's not just the holiday venues that are in on a slice of the profit of these little machines.

A foray into the world of shopping channels on satellite during the footie saw me uncover a new piece of gaming technology. Meet the Power Joy 2 – an N64-shaped controller that plugs straight into your TV. Though the presenters were clueless, the product itself looked fairly good. Boasting fairly advanced 8-bit graphics, and a fair few classics included with the 100-odd games, it can't be a bad deal.

I am still undecided about these little machines – they give us classic games for cheap prices, but it all seems a bit tacky. I just wondered what your experiences with these consoles are, and your opinion on them.

Sammy Barker

games™: Cheap, nasty, sometimes bordering on (if not actually) illegal. We're aware of most of these 'all in one' machines and, in our opinion, they're best avoided. If you're after old-school classics, go buy yourself a second-hand console and some games so that you can enjoy them the way nature (or Nippon) intended.

☐ **bmxgamer**
I was speaking to my friend about how long it took from him to complete *KOTOR*. He said it took him under 20 hours on Light mode. I told him I'd clocked up over five hours and I was still on Taris. After some ridiculing he asked why it's taking me so long. I didn't have a 'proper' answer. I was so immersed it didn't seem like over five hours had passed, it seemed more like ten minutes. Looking back at games I've played I realise that most 'good' games have taken up so much of my time. Games like *Metroid Prime*, *FFX*, *Ocarina Of Time*, *GTA3*/*VC*, *Pokémon* and *Metal Gear Solid* are some of the best games around in my opinion, and I've played each for well over 20 hours and enjoyed every second. First time around, they took me ages to complete and they keep me coming back for more. Conversely, games like *Splinter Cell* and *Resident Evil* took me ages to complete, but I really wanted them to end – every minute felt like an hour. Time was one reason why I didn't enjoy those games. Is it important to you that a game accumulates plenty of time without the 'when is it going to end' feeling? Is the amount of time it takes to complete a game important to you?

☐ **Hong Kong Phooey**
If you're enjoying a game, then you can play it for hours and not notice the time flying by. On the other hand, if a game is frustrating (through bad design or you're crap at it) then you'll probably notice every second. If you have that 'when is it going to end' feeling you're playing the wrong game. Probably. What's funny is that I really enjoyed *Splinter Cell*, despite the trial-and-error gameplay, and I didn't want it to end. Of course, I might've completely missed your point.

☐ **SuperAl**
I found that many games recently have that 'When is this going to end' feeling, and you only end up playing them out because you either want to know what happens or you've made the effort to come this far. *Banjo-Tooie* and *NWN* have been prime examples of these in recent years (other games like *Wind Waker* I couldn't be bothered to finish). I s'pose there are types of games that are good on one level that they still keep you entertained, and you must get some enjoyment out of them, but they do feel like a chore towards the end. Games like *Baldur's Gate II*, however – which is heavily story-based with hundreds of side-quests – I never wanted to end, and while I played for hours completing all the side quests I could find (I found a lot), it eventually did end after maybe 100+ hours. I enjoyed every single moment of it. There are shorter games that fall into the second category, where you really wish they could go on forever. *Grim Fandango* and the *Monkey Island* games are prime examples.

☐ **Ianos**
Frankly, I gave up on *Splinter Cell* – I'm only on about the third level. I just can't do it, and as such I don't want to do it. Conversely, *Freedom Fighters* finished way too soon for me – I was playing it all day every day for two weeks solid. I found it hideously hard at first, but I enjoyed it all the way. When it finished I played it through again. There aren't that many games that do this to me any more, which is a shame. I tend to play stuff more like *SSX 3* and *Smackdown*, where I can play for a while and build up stats or something, though not an RPG, as I can't be bothered with any right now.

☐ **Nitric**
I really didn't want *The Wind Waker* to end. It was a wonderful game and sailing was actually quite relaxing and not the chore most people made it out to be. It was the first time I felt like I was actually adventuring. I stayed up till two o'clock in the morning playing *Pokémon Blue*. It's the only game to do that to me so far.


68p
60p
5 a-day
Eat 1-Up mushrooms to increase your vitality when dead
One serving = one life
MARIO
1-up
mushrooms
versatile 250g
Mild flavour
30/12/03
UK SMC3
games™
31/12/03